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OR
THE SPIDER AND THE FLY

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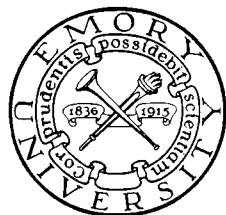
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THE
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A

Story of the Day, and a Tale of the Turf as it is.

BY

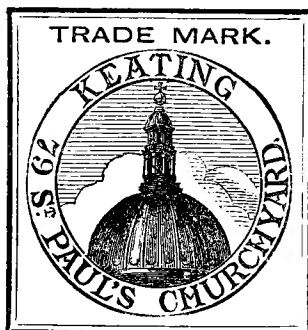
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CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I.—‘Coming of Age.’ 	1
II.—‘Another Name.’ 	10
III.—‘Favorita.’ 	15
IV.—‘A Taste for the Turf’	28
V.—‘Fashionable Dissipation.’ 	38
VI.—‘The Duel with Swords.’ 	49
VII.—‘Marriette has her choice.’ 	57
VIII.—‘The Spider.’ 	62
IX.—‘An Original Suicide.’ 	80
X.—‘Logwood’s Chester Cup.’ 	88
XI.—‘The Fly Flutters.’ 	96
XII.—‘A Strange Freak of the Owner.’ 	105
XIII.—‘The Night before the Derby.’ 	116
XIV.—‘The Field against the Favourite.’ 	122
XV.—‘The Spider’s next Victim.’ 	131
XVI.—‘Oatley’s Revenge.’ 	140
XVII.—‘The Fall of the Curtain.’ 	15

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THE
FAVOURITE SCRATCHED;
OR,
THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.

CHAPTER I.

‘COMING OF AGE.’

THE misfortunes of the Marquis of Rackington began at a very early age. When he was barely ten his father died, leaving him a princely property which had descended from father to son during six generations; not an acre was mortgaged, and there was a handsome amount of personalty in the hands of Messrs. Coutts & Co. The Marquis of Rackington had held high office in the state, and having deserved well of his country had been liberally rewarded. George, third Marquis of Rackington, had been Governor-General of India, and he brought home with him most costly presents which he had received from Rajah and Nawab, as well as expensive articles of Indian manufacture, which looked well in his halls and castles in England, there hanging up in perpetuity to remind his descendants of the exalted position once held by their distinguished ancestor. George, third Marquis of Rackington, little thought that the

disastrous time would come, when the hammer of the auctioneer should sound through the various houses in which his treasures were stored, and that his name would be dragged through the mire, and become food for satire in the penny papers.

Henry, seventh Marquis of Rackington, was thus described, a few years ago, in the various peerages :—

‘Educated at Eton. Town address, Grosvenor Square. Country : Titchfield Hall, Warwickshire ; Halsted Castle, near Market Harborough ; The Lodge, Riddle Aston ; Bedfarey, Flintshire ; Ury, Perthshire, Scotland. Clubs : Arthur’s, Egerton’s, Pratt’s, Carlton.’

The marquis was a delicate child. At Eton he was not capable of much exertion. He had a private tutor to save him the worry of getting up his school work all by himself. The river did not see much of him, unless he was rowed by some one, and in the playing fields he seldom got further than a game of stump and ball. He was not at Eton more than three years—his mother’s solicitude occasioned his leaving, and he came home, travelled, and the time glided on until he came of age. Having been spoilt while young, he grew up opinionated and obstinate. He would do as he liked, and would brook no control. The marchioness soon gave up the attempt to control him, seeing that it was worse than useless to do so. His obstinacy made her weep bitter tears, for she dreaded the end of a fast career which it seemed to be his ambition to lead.

He had not made many friends during his minority, but he was acquainted with Sir Sutton Courtney, and Ord Parker, Farr Fowler, and a few others, well known in London society.

Sir Sutton Courtney had once been rich, but he got

into the money-lender's hands, and soon dissipated a fine estate. He was the proprietor of race-horses, and having gained some experience on the turf, he contrived to make his horses keep him when everything else was gone. He moved in the best society, and was, in every sense of the word, a gentleman. The marquis met him at Wiesbaden, and they travelled together. It was through Sir Sutton that the young nobleman imbibed a taste for the turf in the first instance, and commenced that extraordinary racing career which is without a parallel in the annals of the turf. During the minority of the Marquis of Rackington, the ready money left by his father had accumulated, and besides an income of forty thousand a year, he had at his banker's the magnificent sum of two hundred and fifty thousand pounds.

This quarter of a million he looked upon as a windfall with which it was his bounden duty to make ducks and drakes. Carriage-builders, horse-dealers, and others received extensive orders from him, and he astonished the Parisian world by his appearance in the Bois de Boulogne before he was twenty. Indeed before he came of age he was fifty thousand pounds in debt, which was a fair beginning. All claims against him he discharged.

He was particularly anxious to own race horses, and wanted to buy a number of yearlings to enter for the great races, so that in a few years' time his name would be well known, and he might have the honour and distinction of winning a Derby.

However, this did not take place as soon as it might have done, for he did not meet a gentleman who exhibited a paternal interest in his affairs until a few months after coming of age. Great rejoicings were made by the marquis's tenants when he arrived at man's estate, which

ought to bring discretion with it. Oxen were roasted whole, and casks of ale broached by the roadside so that all who liked might drink. The marquis went from one seat to another, made a few speeches, and after declaring confidentially to Ord Parker, whom he took with him, that he felt dreadfully bored, returned to London, having no taste for country life, and saying that town was the only place where a man could really enjoy life.

In person he was short and slim, his face was very aristocratic and well chiselled; he never had any colour in it, and there was generally an air of fatigue and a look of dissipation hidden under its well-bred composure.

When a big fish rises to the surface of the stream the anglers who are on the watch generally whip the surface with most tempting baits.

The Marquis of Rackington was a very big fish, and he made a splash. That caused all the money-lenders and adventurers in London to prick up their ears. The whisper went abroad that he was inclined to go the pace and plunge, as no one had ever plunged before, and all the live-upon-their-wits division were on the *qui vive*.

Among the innumerable schemers, with which London abounds, was a Mr. Reginald Hawkes, who had the reputation of being better able to weave a web, in which to mesh a silly fly, than any other two-legged spider living.

Hawkes was a money-lender. He had property of his own and was not a penniless adventurer, far from it. Some said he had been a solicitor, but his name had not appeared in the law list for some years; perhaps it was not worth his while to pay the sum required to take out his certificate. Certainly he showed his knowledge of the laws of his country, or at least the criminal portion of them, by steering clear of the Middlesex sessions and the Old Bailey. No one

could make a specific allegation against him, and yet it was quite enough to mention Reginald Hawkes' name to a man of the world to make him shake his head and purse up his mouth doubtfully. Everybody seemed to think Hawkes a scoundrel, they could not say why they thought so ; he was the victim of an impression. Suspicion's breath had in an evil hour encompassed him, and he suffered in consequence.

He owned a few race-horses, but they were mere platers, and of no use for the big events ; still, they answered his purpose, and gave him a valid excuse for appearing in the ring on the various race-courses with which this country abounds.

Hawkes was a friend of Sir Sutton Courtnay's, at least he told people so, and Sir Sutton did not deny it. The fact was, the unfortunate baronet had tumbled into Mr. Hawkes' web one fine morning when he went fluttering along in all the heedless jollity of youth, regardless of the future, and living only in the present.

Sir Sutton was a wonderful fly, he lasted so long. There was always something to be got out of Sir Sutton ; he knew so many good men, and threw business into the hands of the financial agent, which was what Hawkes called himself.

Hawkes had battened upon Sir Sutton for years, and there was little doubt that he would continue to do so until there was nothing left of the poor fly but the two wings and the dried up husk of the body.

It was the height of the London season. Everybody was in town except the members of the royal family. The Queen was somewhere in the country, nobody seemed to know where, and nobody seemed to care very much, except the shopkeepers, who said they were being ruined. The Prince

of Wales was travelling—what was the London season to him? So they growled.

The marquis was creating a sensation, and had made his appearance with Captain Craven and Ord Parker at Lincoln, the Epsom spring meeting and at Newmarket, making large bets, always losing, and paying with apparent indifference.

At Long's one night he met Sir Sutton Courtnay and went to Arthur's with him. He took it into his head to have a game at draughts, and played three games for a thousand a game, losing all three. He then cut a pack of cards for five hundred each time, and in less than an hour and a half lost five thousand pounds to Sir Sutton, who received an open cheque on the spot for the money.

The fame of these and similar eccentricities soon got abroad, and every one talked of the young Marquis of Rackington as the new plunger.

'Plunger' was a word invented expressly for him; no one had ever been said to 'plunge' before he came on the scene, and if he did nothing else, he may be thanked for adding a word to our slang dictionary, in which the reading ought to be—

Plunge *v.* to spend a magnificent fortune as quickly as possible, break the hearts of your friends, and die at five-and-twenty without a penny.

Plunger *s.* See Plunge. One who astonishes the world by the grandeur of his folly; a flat. Compare idiot.

With all his cleverness Sir Sutton Courtnay was hit, and hit hard. He had backed a horse for the City and Suburban, but its owner, finding the public rushed on with such eagerness as to force the horse up to three to one in the betting, which prevented him from getting any money on at anything like a reasonable price, scratched it at the last moment. The

horse, which was called Rascal, could undoubtedly have won the City and Suburban. But the metropolitan course required more staying power than he possessed, and Sir Sutton, who stood him again, found when it was too late that the Rascal, although backed by the stable, ran a bad fifth, and upset the pot which had been made over him.

This necessitated a visit to Reginald Hawkes. On the following Monday Sir Sutton would be expected to turn up at the clubs either in person, or through his commissioner, and pay his double losses, which amounted in the aggregate to a couple of thousand. He might have borrowed it from Rackington, but Courtney was far too shrewd a man of the world to dream of doing anything of the sort.

He knew as well as any one that to borrow is to lose your friend. Men will not lend money. They don't like those who come after them for it. It is an unpleasant thing to say no, and there are some men who, to keep up their reputation for generosity and for the sake of old times, will lend you half the amount you ask for, saying that it is all they have at their banker's, and hate you in their heart, ever afterward for having made them 'part.' A man who lends a friend money does not get it back again once in a hundred times. It is practically a gift. If a man gets into such a state as to necessitate his borrowing money at all from friends, depend upon it his credit is utterly gone everywhere else—that the odds are a thousand to ten, he will never recover himself, and is in a desperate condition. The man who borrows money from his friends has generally two or three bills in his pocket, which he shows you and tells you they are unexceptionable and as good as the bank. The acceptor is a gentleman of property, and only wants a little temporary accommodation, or has put his name on the kite out of pure good nature and to oblige

you. Yet your money-borrowing friend can't get his bills discounted. They lie in his pocket till they get dirty and discoloured. Perhaps he borrows a pound or two on them ; a month afterwards you find him with a new batch. London swarms with these men ; they have been in the army, or army agents, and sometimes they are in luck, sometimes out of it. They live chiefly by travelling in the wine trade, getting bills discounted for officers and others who are driven into the hands of the discounters ; they receive fifteen per cent. commission from the wine merchant they are connected with, and bother their friends for orders, or waste hours in a public-house trying to induce the proprietor to give them an order for a butt of sherry.

When driven into a corner they will try and quarter themselves in the house of a friend, who, if good-natured enough to take them in, may have the felicity of showing them every species of hospitality for several weeks, only to be told afterwards, when the H. U., or hard up, member of society comes home in a state of vinous excitement, and is quietly remonstrated with by your wife or yourself, that you have insulted him, cancelled the obligation and done away with all your kindness. He has nothing to thank you for, not he—you have treated him cruelly, and he'll wash his hands of you, before long. When he is sober the H. U. thinks better of it, however. You wish he would keep his word—but he shakes you by the hand, smiling blandly the while—asks you if he was not a little bit 'on' last night, as if not quite sure about the transparent past—says he shall be ashamed to look your wife in the face, and does not remember a word that he said or that was said to him. This is awkward, because you spoke sharply with a view to getting rid of him ; but he tells you that you are the best fellow in the world, he does

not know what he should have done without you—eternally indebted, and so on, ending by borrowing five shillings just to take him into the City, where he has important business.

If you were to follow him, you would probably find the H. U. standing in front of a public bar, tossing for drink, and telling his friends of the tavern how very screwed he got the night before as if he was proud of it and intended to repeat the operation. We could continue to write about the H. U. division for hours, but we must pay a visit to Mr. Hawkes's house in Bruton Street.

It is evening, Hawke has just dined with Sir Sutton Courtney at his club and they have come back in the brougham to Hawkes's house to have a quiet chat over a bottle of wine, and a weed. The window is open and the breeze comes in perfumed by the flowers which crowd the window-sill.

CHAPTER II.

'ANOTHER NAME.'

'I MUST have a couple of thousand, Hawkes,' exclaimed Sir Sutton Courtney; 'there's two thou. to pay on Monday which I lost over that infernal horse of Townley's, and I don't believe there's more than five hundred at the bank.'

'What security am I to have?' asked Mr. Hawkes, drily.

Sir Sutton Courtney laughed aloud.

'That's a good joke coming from you, Hawkes,' he said; 'I believe you know more about my affairs than I do myself; at all events you know more than any one else.'

'I must have security.'

'The devil you must! Well, it will be the same as you have had for the last five years.'

'What is that?'

'Personal—nothing else.'

Mr. Hawkes shook his head.

'Won't that do for you?' inquired Sir Sutton, a little uneasily.

'No,' replied Hawkes, decisively.

'Come, Hawkes, I take this unkindly, coming from you,' exclaimed the baronet. 'If I lose once, I win ten times. I shall pull back all and more at Newmarket in a week or two, and I am well on a certainty for the guineas. You always get paid, and my uncle will die some day.'

Sir Sutton had expectations from a rich uncle, who had promised him a corner in his will ever since he had left school.

There was a pause.

The silence irritated Sir Sutton, who said, testily—

‘What the deuce is it you want?’

‘Another name,’ replied Mr. Hawkes.

‘Oh, I see! I daresay you can have that. I don’t like asking a friend to back a bill as a rule, but I must have this money, and if you choose to put the screw on, I must knock under to you, I suppose. Whose name do you want? Have you got your eye on anybody?’

‘Yes.’

‘Who is it? Name, name! as they sometimes say in the House of Commons.’

‘People tell me that you are on the best possible terms with young Rackington. Now the Marquis of Rackington is a man whose name I would take for five or ten thousand willingly.’

Sir Sutton Courtney laughed again, but this time in a quiet chuckling sort of manner.

He saw through the financial agent’s game in an instant.

‘I am willing to get you the marquis’s name, and to introduce you, bring you together, in fact, in a way which will enable you to weave your spells—that’s pretty, isn’t it —weave your spells to some purpose, but not on your terms —oh dear, no. I haven’t arrived at my time of life without learning something. I must be paid for whatever I do in this matter, and handsomely too.’

‘I don’t mind paying,’ said Hawkes.

‘Of course you don’t. Did you ever object to throw out a sprat to catch a herring in your life, Hawkes? Not since I’ve known you, I believe.’

Mr. Hawkes smiled faintly.

‘You see, Hawkes,’ continued Sir Sutton, ‘I can read your soul. Don’t contradict. I can do it. You say to

yourself, If all I hear is true about this man he will go to the bad, and somebody will pluck him, why should he not be my pigeon—why should not I have the pleasure of plucking him? If I could only get hold of him and sell him some of my platers, and buy a few yearlings for him and set him going, he'll soon get down the side of his *Avernus*, of which I will take jolly good care the descent shall be easy enough, and when he is going under, as he must inevitably after a time, I shall be the gainer.'

'Perhaps,' exclaimed Mr. Hawkes, who was not a great talker.

Handing Sir Sutton the box of cigars, he added—

'Take another. They are Partaga's best.'

The baronet did so, and helped himself to some more wine.

'When do you want that two thou.?' asked Mr. Hawkes, looking up suddenly.

'If it is paid into my account at Ransom's on Saturday it will do. I only want my cheques to be met on Monday.'

'It shall be at Ransom's.'

'On the old terms?'

'Precisely.'

'Very well,' said Sir Sutton, in the tone of a man who has had a great weight removed from his breast. 'Now tell me what I am expected to do for this convenience.'

'Just give me an I O U for the two thousand first, and that will be done with.'

He pushed paper and pen and ink over to the baronet, who hastily scribbled the obligation, having sufficient faith in Hawkes to believe that he would keep the promise he had just made him.

'You must bring Rackington here,' replied Hawkes.

'But the attraction. He does not want money.'

‘I know that. I have been thinking about the attraction—it must be a woman. At his susceptible age a woman is the best attraction.’

‘What woman?’

‘Do you remember a ballet last year at the opera house—*Favorita* it was called. The girl who danced the leading part in it is an acquaintance of mine. She sings as well as dances, and will make a little party extremely agreeable; she will do all I tell her, and is rather beautiful.’

‘Is she English?’

‘Unquestionably.’

‘Does she dance now?’

‘No. She has an establishment at Brompton,’ replied Mr. Hawkes who went on quickly as if wishing to avoid any further questioning. ‘Four is quite enough to have at supper. You and I, Rackington, and the *Favorita*, as I always call her.’

‘She is to be the decoy.’

‘As you like; we will not quarrel about terms,’ replied Mr. Hawkes shrugging his shoulders.

‘When is this supper to take place?’

‘You must decide that. Where is the marquis now, and how do his engagements stand?’

‘I will inquire, and drop you a line,’ answered Sir Sutton Courtney. ‘Is there anything else?’

‘You undertake to bring him here?’

‘Certainly.’

‘That’s enough,’ said Mr. Hawkes; ‘on that understanding the money you want shall be paid into Ransom and Bouverie’s, in time for you to meet your liabilities. Now, I suppose you want to go off to the Argyle or some place? Men,’ added Mr. Hawkes, bitterly, ‘never come to see me for friendship’s sake, they always want something, and

when they have got it and served their purpose they take themselves off.'

'My dear good Hawkes—' began Sir Sutton with a half smile.

The discounter interrupted him.

'Don't,' he said, 'don't use any soap; you have what you want, and it is not necessary.'

'You are an odd fish, Hawkes,' said the baronet, filling his cigar case from the box of Partagas.

'Think so?' replied Hawkes, looking curiously at him out of the corners of his eyes.

'But you are a deuced good fellow at bottom.'

Mr. Hawkes regarded him as who should say, '*You* have not got to the bottom of my character and are not likely to.'

'Ta, ta,' added Sir Sutton Courtney, waving his hand, and drawing on his gloves.

Hawkes nodded, and Sir Sutton took his departure.

CHAPTER III.

AVORITA.'

THERE was a certain amount of taste and elegance about Mr. Reginald Hawkes' establishment in Bruton Street which denoted that he had anything but a vulgar mind.

He was a judge of pictures, bronzes, and articles of *vertu* generally, and when a man is a connoisseur in *objets d'art*, it may generally be predicted with safety that he knows good wine from bad, and can give a good dinner.

Hawkes could give a good dinner—there was no doubt about it—but he prided himself especially on his suppers. Every man has *point d'appui*, and Hawkes took his stand on his suppers. He spared no expense and yet he did not overspread his table. He knew just what to get and how to get it. He did not make the fatal mistake of having one lobster and a couple of dozen oysters, for four people. He did not care about knowing a man who was ashamed of his appetite; he liked to see people eat, and if it was in his power to tempt any one, he was the tempter. A vegetarian at his table would have forgotten the tenets of his faith, and have gone in for some of his made dishes, which were perfection. No one could use herbs in cooking in such a subtle way as could Hawkes. The use of garlic was unknown properly in this country until Hawkes closeted himself in the kitchen with his man-cook, and taught him what to do with it. He was a Lucullus. He was the prince of gastronomists, and Sir Sutton Courtnay knew it. Sir Sutton could appreciate a good dinner, as well as

any one, and he never refused to put his legs under Hawkes' mahogany. Hawkes had been in Spain and France, he was personally acquainted with the best wine merchants abroad, and he had his wines direct from them, clearing them from the Custom House himself.

La Favorita, the lady of whom Reginald Hawkes spoke to Sir Sutton Courtney, was a pretty amiable blonde, not quite three-and-twenty. She came out at Covent Garden as a *danseuse*, and, from her *verve* and talent, made a favourable impression upon all the *habitués* of the stalls, who are said to be the patrons of the ballet. People said, after she left the opera, that she was not quite proper, but people say such ill-natured things that it is just possible they may have been wrong. However, she gave up dancing when the season was over, and lived on a ground floor in a pretty villa in Brompton, with a garden in front and behind, filled with pretty flowers and having a grassy lawn shaded by leafy trees. She was occasionally seen at Richmond and Greenwich with an elderly gentleman, who was said to be a Cabinet Minister and a married man, but the *Favorita* represented him to be her uncle, and what could scandal say after that? Nothing to her prejudice let it be hoped.

La Favorita had the most charming little round face, with a nose that had a celestial tendency, that is to say, it would turn up just the least bit, and she smiled like a syren. Her pretty lips were always full and red, her form was rounded and voluptuous, and she had the prettiest little hands, and—let it be said under one's breath—the prettiest little legs that ever trod the stage at Her Majesty's or Covent Garden.

This was the little woman whom Reginald Hawkes had selected to meet the Marquis of Rackington.

He was a judge of horses and women, and he could gauge a man's character by looking at him a couple of minutes, and talking to him for five. But horses and women were his speciality. If Hawkes said a woman was beautiful, you might depend upon it that she was a *rara avis*, because he seldom if ever indulged in superlatives, when he was positive he was right. If Hawkes went to a sale at Tattersall's and bid for a horse, it was sure to be run up to double its value, so that he often put up his own horses for sale as the "property of a gentleman," and went and bid for them. When he really wanted anything, he had his agents, and was not seen himself in the matter.

There had been a meeting of the gun club at Shepherd's Bush, and the marquis, having failed to distinguish himself by killing his birds, was glad to see Sir Sutton Courtney in the enclosure.

'How do, Courtney?' he exclaimed.

'Well, thanks; and you?' was the reply.

'I am afraid champagne at midnight is beginning to tell upon my nerves,' said the young marquis.

'Nerves!' repeated Sir Sutton Courtney, who was a man of iron with the constitution of a horse. 'What are nerves? I have none. Great mistake to have nerves.'

'Missed every bird. Never saw Rackington shoot so badly,' observed Ord Parker, who was standing by.

'Lucky for you you did not back the shot against the feathers,' said Sir Sutton.

'Ya'as, by jove, ya'as,' laughed Captain Craven, who had killed every time.

'Give me a moment, Harry,' said Sir Sutton.

Slipping his arm into that of the marquis, they walked away together.

'What are you going to do to-night?' he continued.

‘Nothing of any importance. I promised the mater that I would go with her to the Countess Morton’s.

‘Report says you are hard hit in that quarter.’

‘I?’

‘Yes, indeed,’ said Sir Sutton Courtney, smiling, ‘with Lady Marriette. That is her name, I think; only daughter, a remarkably handsome girl. Is it a true bill? Come, confess. You ought to tell your friend these things.’

‘Pon my honour, I don’t know; she’s very nice as girls go. There is no money with her, but that does not matter, I have plenty. I give you my word, if it ever comes to anything, it will be a family match.’

‘What is that?’

‘Why, you know, a match got up by the mothers—not exactly an affair of the heart; no romance about it.’

‘Shall you go to Lady Morton’s, and see Marriette?’

‘Just for an hour or so,’ replied the marquis, with some confusion. ‘Why?’

‘Oh, it does not matter,’ said the latter, with an air of indifference.

‘You have a reason. I know you have a reason, Courtney; you never ask a question or make a bet without a reason.’

‘I wanted you to come to a place I know.’

‘What place?’

‘Place in Bruton Street. Just a little supper. Very *recherché* and all that; you and I and the man of the house.’

‘Who’s the fourth?’

‘A little woman.’

‘A little woman! I like the sound of that; you know, Courtney, little women are my weakness. I go mad over little women. Is she pretty?’

‘Very.’

‘And nice?’ pursued the marquis.

‘Perfection.’

‘I—I must throw the Morton girl over. You have excited my curiosity; you have, by Jove, Courtney. Tell me, who is your man?’

‘His name is Hawkes, used to be a solicitor or something, has means and does everything properly. You can trust yourself in his company, there is nothing of the monied cad about him; he has race-horses, and I have occasionally made him my commissioner.’

‘The very man I want to get hold of,’ cried the marquis, gleefully. ‘I have an idea of starting a few horses, and very likely your fellow—what’s his name, Hawkes?—will do it for me. It is such a comfort to get hold of a man you know—one who won’t swindle you.’

‘Hawkes is square enough. We are brother masons, and masons always meet on the square. You must be a free and accepted mason.’

‘If you advise me.’

‘I do.’

‘Now let me hear something about the woman.’

‘I have already told you she is perfection,’ answered Sir Sutton Courtney.

‘That is vague. Is she fair or dark?’

‘Fair.’

‘Capital. That is like Marriette. Do you know, Courtney, Marriette’s great charm in my eyes is her lovely hair.’

‘Take care. These are the days of aquæ and all sorts of washes.’

‘Marriette would not stoop to such deception.’

‘Then she is the first woman I ever heard of who would

hesitate at any artifice to catch a man. You are young, dear boy, and haven't cut your wisdom teeth.'

'Don't you be so sure of that!' returned Rackington, with a look of profound and universal knowledge.

'Well, don't be offended. You are a man of the world, I know, more so than most men of your age, but women are so devilish cunning.'

'I admit that,' replied Rackington, a little mollified.

'I have no confidence in them myself.'

'Nor I. What is the name of your paragon?'

'Not mine. I know nothing about her, I have only seen her on the stage. Do you remember La Favorita last season at Gye's house?'

'Hazily.'

'Oh, then you don't recollect this girl; she was the first dancer in it, and Hawkes calls her Favorita. He has something to do with the opera, I think, and meets these people occasionally.'

'Oh, I see,' replied Rackington.

'Will you come with me?'

'If you will take me. At what time?'

'Say ten.'

'Very well. I shall have time perhaps to do the severely proper at the Morton's before I meet you; if not, *n'importe*.'

'Where will you meet me?' asked Sir Sutton.

'Why should we part?'

'I really don't know. I have nothing to do. Quite on the retired list.'

'Shall I drive you down to Richmond? I have those bays you recommended me to buy.'

'Yes; do as you like with me.'

So they went to Richmond, dined there, and drove back

to town in the cool of the evening to dress, and then made their way to Bruton Street.

Of course Marriette Morton was neglected, if not altogether forgotten. A woman who had been on the stage had an interest in Rackington's eyes ; young men as a rule like actresses, and he was rather proud of an introduction to the *coulisses*. Courtnay, who was an old and hardened sinner, had taken him behind the scenes many times. He had a vague idea that he had seen the Favorita somewhere, but he was not sure. If she was the woman he meant, she was very pretty and quite enchanting in her way.

'She can play, and sing, and dance, and has accomplishments,' remarked Sir Sutton Courtnay as they went along.

'Bother the playing unless a woman can do it really well. What is worse—what can be a greater infliction than to be condemned to listen to a girl in a drawing-room who has no more idea of music than a bull frog, and who is led out by her mamma like a lamb to the shambles. In my opinion music cannot be acquired. It is born with one like—like—I know there is something born, not made ; I used to say it in Latin.'

'A poet,' supplied Sir Sutton.

'Yes ; that is it. *Poeta* something, *non fit* ; and so it is with a really good musician.'

'I am with you there.'

When they arrived at Mr. Hawkes' house they found the host alone. The Favorita had not arrived, though Sir Sutton Courtnay had taken the precaution to telegraph from Richmond to say they were coming. The baronet began to grow rather alarmed. He had heard of the shortcomings of the London District Telegraph and feared that his message had not been delivered.

He introduced the Marquis of Rackington to Mr. Hawkes.

who began to talk in an easy familiar sort of manner about various topics of the day, which convinced the marquis that "the fellow was a gentleman, although he had been an attorney," as Sir Sutton had told him. Sir Sutton Courtney was very bitter against the whole race of lawyers, as he had suffered severely when younger in more than one legal contest.

The marquis examined the pictures on the walls at Mr. Hawkes' request, and Sir Sutton Courtney had an opportunity of remarking to Hawkes—

'You had my telegram, I hope?'

'Yes,' was the reply.

'In time?'

'Yes.'

'Where is she?' asked Sir Sutton Courtney.

'She will be here presently. I never like to rush these things. I must make my impression first, the woman hers afterwards.'

'Very true.'

Mr. Hawkes followed the marquis to the other end of the apartment, and began to talk about his pictures.

'Are you a connoisseur, my lord?' he inquired.

'I know when I like a thing,' replied the marquis.

'But the different schools——'

'I know nothing of them. I have some very fine paintings, they tell me, at Titchfield and Halstead, but to me they are old and worthless.'

'Ah, I perceive,' said Mr. Hawkes, 'you prefer the modern style.'

'Yes, the academy show.'

'Mine, I fear, will not interest you, after that admission. They are all by the old masters.'

There was a ring at the door bell.

Presently a little lady—in evening dress, very low, but that was the fashion's fault, not hers, perhaps—entered the room.

She was very rosy, and pretty, and blue-eyed, and *mignon*. She wore a profusion of lace over a light silk skirt, and her hair fell in waves over her forehead. She had a curl hanging down her neck, and her back hair was made into a coil and twisted round. Her eyes were full and round—they were irresistible. Her mouth wreathed with smiles. Her voice soft, sweet, and musical.

It was the Favorita.

Mr. Hawkes took her by the hand and led her to the marquis, saying—

‘I shall reverse the order of things, my dear child, and introduce you to a young nobleman who from his rank, wealth, and position, may be of service to you with the managers of theatres. This is Favorita, Lord Rackington.’

‘I am very pleased to be made acquainted with so charming a young lady, though I must find fault with your gallantry, Mr. Hawkes,’ said the marquis.

He gazed with undisguised admiration at the pretty little creature before him.

‘In this country a rich lord is all powerful,’ continued Mr. Hawkes.

‘Except in the House of Commons,’ said Sir Sutton.

‘And you must know,’ Hawkes went on, not heeding the interruption, ‘that my Favorita has been out of an engagement all the season, because she happened to offend some official connected with the management, and for that reason I venture to beg your kind offices, if an opportunity should present itself.’

‘I think I may safely promise to make it my business to seek an opportunity of being of service to your friend,

Mr. Hawkes,' answered the marquis, still trying to peer into the Favorita's blue eyes.

'The old humbug,' muttered Sir Sutton Courtney.

If this remark applied to Mr. Hawkes it was not strictly correct. We do not mean to say that he was not a humbug. Very possibly he was. He may have been the prince of that numerous society, if humbugs are in favour of monarchical institutions and have princes—we are alluding to the age. He was not old. Mr. Hawkes could not have been more than five-or six-and-forty when we introduce him to the reader, though he looked a little older, on account of the hard lines on his face and the iron-grey of his whiskers, and with which his hair was sparsely scattered.

Mr. Hawkes quitted his hold of the Favorita's hand and spoke in a low tone to the marquis, telling him very much what Sir Sutton Courtney had already told him respecting the girl, and he managed to excite his interest and sympathy in her—always a great thing to effect. The marquis began to believe, before he knew anything of her, that she was a very talented young person, in whom Mr. Hawkes took a paternal interest through knowing some members of her family, since dead; and that she had been kept in the background through the jealousy of other professionals, who were afraid of being eclipsed by her, and were aided in their backstairs' intrigues by men having authority in the theatres, who ought to have been above such petty prejudice.

A footman in livery, blue and silver, wearing plush and hair-powder, announced supper.

'Sir Sutton, will you lead the way? My lord, may I ask you to take the Favorita?' exclaimed Mr. Hawkes, bringing up the rear, when his requests had been complied with.

The supper was laid in a small room, oak-wainscotted, having the ceiling painted by a masterly hand, representing allegories, the design of which was not very apparent, but the effect of which was charming. One could see a confused mass of cupids and nymphs, much human form and very little drapery. What a pity it is that art and delicacy do not always go together.

Everything that money could obtain, and the appetite wish for, and that the culinary art could supply, was placed upon the table.

The Marquis of Rackington enjoyed himself immensely. He told Courtnay confidentially that he had not been to such a jolly party since he was in Paris.

The Favorita tried to make herself agreeable, and she always was fascinating.

Rackington paid the little *danseuse* many compliments, and as Mr. Hawkes and Sir Sutton talked together, they were left very much to themselves. After a little while they talked of love in the abstract, and the Favorita said—

‘I have no doubt you have been in love many times.’

‘Why?’ he asked.

‘I think you are gay,’ she replied, casting down her eyes.

‘No,’ he answered, ‘I have never laid myself open to suspicion but once, and that was when I flirted with a cousin, who was very stiff and formal and disagreeable. There was no bend in her; she boasted that the whole effort of her life was to elevate millinery into an art and a science, and made it a rule only to dance with the House of Lords.’

‘Girls must dress, it is their only chance, if they wish to go about and captivate a comfortable income,’ said the Favorita.

‘Is that your ambition?’

‘Amongst other things.’

‘Charming candour! I admire frankness above all things,’ said the marquis.

‘It is not nice to be poor,’ she observed, with an expressive shrug of the shoulders.

‘Do you not believe in two loving hearts bringing happiness?’

‘Not without a banking account.’

‘I am afraid you are mercenary.’

‘Not in the least. I have common sense, that is all, and have known the misery of a large family and a slender income. Of course you,’ she said, ‘cannot enter into such petty details of household economy as having the water supply stopped, or the gas cut off, or the cessation of tradesmen’s calls for orders. I have gone through it all, when at home.’

The marquis owned that she was right, and that as he had always had plenty of money, he could not enter into her arguments. They then talked about dress, a theme upon which the Favorita became animated.

She defended the fashion, and said she was strongly in favour of Liliput bonnets. After that he asked her where she lived, and if he might venture to call.

‘I am suburban,’ she answered, ‘and perhaps you may call by-and-bye, but I must see you again, first. Please talk to Mr. Hawkes now; it will be singular if you do not, will it not?’

The mushroom-looking corks lying on the table indicated that more than one bottle of champagne had been opened.

When supper was over, the Favorita, at Mr. Hawkes’ request, backed up by the marquis, sang one or two songs, which she delivered with great judgment and feeling.

Rackington was charmed, and saw her into her brougham about half-past one, when she took her departure.

He squeezed her hand and said, 'We must meet again.

'Perhaps,' she replied, showing her pearly teeth, with an air of admirable coquetry.

The brougham drove away and the marquis re-entered the house. Mr. Hawkes was not in the supper room.

'Well,' said Sir Sutton Courtnay, 'what do you think of the little woman?'

'She is charming,' replied the marquis in raptures.

'I knew you would say so.'

'When can I see her again? She would not give me her address. Make some arrangement with your friend, will you? I shall consider it a favour.'

Sir Sutton nodded, and Mr. Hawkes re-entered the apartment with a bottle, having a green seal, in his hand.

It was some choice Johannisberg.

The supper was over but he did not intend to let his guests depart until they had fully tasted and acknowledged the excellences and resources of his extensive and incomparable cellar.

CHAPTER IV

A TASTE FOR THE TURF.'

'THE young marquis,' as he began to be familiarly called on race-courses and in the places where betting men congregated, fell readily into the trap laid for him by Hawkes, who sold him a few of his horses, bought him some excellent yearlings at the Hampton Court sales, from Middle Park, Newmarket, and other sources. The most promising of these was Evandia. His horses were entered in due form for the different races, and Lord Rackington commenced a career on the turf.

A course of dissipation and folly he had already embraced, and his friends saw that he had not the physical strength and stamina to successfully endure the life he was leading for any length of time. He belonged to what Lavater calls the bilious-nervous order of men, and his nervous energy often carried him on when his actual power was overtaxed, and he would have given way had he been of a calmer temperament.

The Marquis of Rackington was not long in establishing relations of a most intimate nature with the Favorita, who played into Reginald Hawkes' hands, and having no heart, felt no compunction in making her young dupe spend a fortune upon her.

She expressed a liking for hunting, and he took her down to his place in Leicestershire, telling her that she should follow the hounds, which she did. They met at Staunton Gorse, near Market Harborough, and she distin-

guished herself by going over Staunton brook in a masterly manner, and clearing two fences and two sets of rails. If she had not been so accomplished she might not have attracted attention. People noticed her, and when men begin to look at a woman they are sure to ask who she is. The answer was not satisfactory, and the master of the hounds politely intimated to the Marquis of Rackington that her room in future would be more desirable than her company. Enraged at this intimation she went to the next meet, and took with her a red herring tied to a string, which she dragged about in the cover and in various directions. This so spoilt the scent that the hounds could not find, and when they did find they went wrong. The huntsman was furious, and the whole morning was cut to waste in fruitless efforts to start a fox and follow him.

At last the hounds were called off, and dogs and men went to another cover, much dispirited with their ill success. The Favorita took care that the story should be made known, and having had her revenge, and caused a sensation, she went back to town much pleased with herself and her labour.

The open way in which he paraded himself with the Favorita created a great scandal in London fashionable circles, and Lady Marriette Morton treated him coldly. It required all the tact of his mother to prevent the engagement from being broken off. Had he not been rich and titled, and the Mortons poor, it is more than probable he would have been sent to the right-about at once. However he was tolerated.

‘He is very young, you know,’ said the countess, ‘and young men will do silly things. There is one consolation, the sort of attachment he has formed is always of a fleeting nature. It must essentially be so, and after all, rakes make

the best husbands ; not that I mean to say Harry is a rake, though it must be confessed he is a little fast. It is the fault of the age, telegraphs and steam-engines have made us fast.'

'The peeresses laughed, and it was agreed that Lady Marriette Morton should be blind to her lover's faults, and that the Marchioness of Rackington should endeavour to bring the match about as soon as possible.

The marquis became slangy in his conversation, and rather affected the society of racing-men, and those who were horsey.

The season passed, and the dreary winter came, bringing a season of rest to the busy racing men, and allowing the marquis to indulge magnificent anticipations of the future, when he would have the best three-year-old, and land his colours first at the post, the winner of the Derby.

Mr. Hawkes was constantly coming in contact with the marquis, who rather affected his society ; he liked to ask Hawkes' advice. If he was doubtful about doing a thing, he would put a man who was bothering him off, by saying—

'Wait till I have asked Hawkes.'

Whether it was from his private character, or because his name was what it was, Mr. Hawkes was constantly spoken of as 'the Bird of Prey.' Once a well-known horse-dealer wanted to sell the marquis a pair of splendid grays, and had offered Sellhouse, a man with three hundred a-year, knocking about town, fifteen per cent. on the bargain if he sold the horses. Sellhouse knew Rackington through having been at Eton with him, and spoke to him about it in the room at Tattersall's.

'I'll see Hawkes about it,' answered 'young 'Arry,' as the racing-men were beginning affectionately to call him.

‘Hawkes is my friend, you know, and I’ll see you again.’

Sellhouse went and told this to the horse-dealer.

‘Oh!’ exclaimed the latter, ‘if the marquis is going to speak to the Bird of Prey, he’ll put the ki-bosh on the whole thing, it will be a case of Jack-up-the-orchard with it, and we shall have to keep the ’orses.’

He was right. They had to keep the horses, because Hawkes had a pair of his own, he wanted to sell. People always do want to sell horses if they can get anything by it, and Hawkes knew he could make a hundred or two by the transaction.

There was a horse called Ocean which came with ‘a rush for the Two Thousand Guineas. The marquis had lost money at Lincoln, at Epsom, at the Newmarket Craven, so he wanted to pull it back over the Guineas. Everybody said the briny element, as Ocean was playfully called, was the best public performer, and must walk in. Hawkes said that public form was everything. The marquis could not do better than back public form.

‘What a horse has done, my lord, is an index to what he can do,’ he observed.

‘The thing is—is he meant?’ remarked Sir Sutton Courtney who was in the room.

‘I know Mr. Leary, the owner, very well, and I am sure he would keep faith with the public, and not play into the hands of the ring men,’ said Mr. Hawkes.

‘The ring men are the ruin of the turf,’ said Sir Sutton.

‘They are very convenient to bet with; and after all what would racing be without betting?’

‘A surer way of trying the merits of a horse than it is now,’ replied Sir Sutton.

Hawkes smiled grimly.

'It will be a great race,' he exclaimed. 'The excitement about it is wonderful. I remember the Gladiateur and Breadalbane years. They were great, but this will be greater.'

'Excitement wears me out,' remarked the marquis, throwing himself into a chair with a yawn.

'Nonsense, you live upon it,' replied Sir Sutton.

'*Beatus ille, qui procul negotiis,*' the marquis answered. 'You see I remember my Horace. Do you know Latin, Hawkes?'

'I had what was called a classical and commercial education, my lord, but I must admit that commerce has rather elbowed the ancients into a corner.'

'If an Eton man does not know Latin and Greek,' said Sir Sutton Courtney, who was at Rugby, 'it shows that he learnt nothing while he was at school, as they teach nothing else there.'

'Yes, they do,' said the marquis.

'What?'

'They teach you at Eton to be a gentleman.'

'Which perhaps is very necessary in some cases. It is a pity they did not send one or two men I know there,' said Sir Sutton.

'It's a matter of great regret to your friends that you were not there,' observed the marquis playfully.

'I was going to offer you one of the best cigars my man can supply. Now I refuse,' said Sir Sutton.

'Never mind, my lord. I have some here,' said Mr. Hawkes, offering his case.

'Tell me, Hawkes, what will win the Guineas, and I'll pay you five per cent. on all I pull off!' exclaimed the marquis.

‘I think the pathless deep, that is to say, Ocean ; if he tries he must walk in.’

‘Yes,’ said Sir Sutton Courtney, ‘he will walk in—with the crowd.’

‘Don’t be so sure of that,’ observed Hawkes with a knowing shake of the head.

‘He is a roarer,’ continued Sir Sutton, ‘and his owner has hedged all his money.’

‘I mean,’ said the marquis, lighting two cigars and holding one in each hand, so as to smoke the two at once and keep them cooler than if they were smoked one at a time, ‘to go upon an entirely new system at the Turf Metropolis this year.’

‘What is that?’ asked Sir Sutton.

‘I mean to back favourites. The favourites always win on Newmarket Heath. I shall go on the Martingale principle and double every time.’

‘For instance——’

‘For instance, I shall put, say a hundred pounds, on the favourite for the first race. Whether I win or lose I shall put two hundred on the favourite for the next race, four hundred on the third, eight on the fourth, sixteen on the fifth, three thousand two hundred on the sixth, and so on. But for the Guineas I shall back Ocean, and if I win I shall say I have made oceans of money.’

‘You will win on your Martingale system, but you will lose everything if you back the briny impostor. He is all legs and wings, a huge raking sort of brute.’

All the better for the course,’ said Mr. Hawkes.

‘I don’t think so.’

‘By the way, I have an idea, or rather a riddle. Is a riddle an idea?’ said the marquis.

‘After a fashion.’

‘If all the seas were dried up, what would Neptune say?’
You give it up, don’t you?’

‘Yes. What would he say?’

‘I haven’t a notion.’

There was a laugh at this somewhat puerile joke, which was inspired by the name of the popular favourite for the Two Thousand.

The marquis did exactly as he had said he would, and made money by backing the favourites, but he lost all he had won and more, by the reckless way in which he stood Ocean. He almost frightened some of the leviathan book-makers by the offers he made to them.

After the race he went back to London, and to get rid of the recollection of a disastrous campaign, went to a ball, an invitation to which he found on his table on his arrival in town.

In the ball-room he met the young Earl of Sark, who held property in the Channel Islands, and wanted to go on the turf. He had not been to Newmarket, and eagerly button-holed Rackington to get some news.

‘Was it a fine race?’ he asked.

‘Capital. Never saw a finer,’ answered Rackington, who considered himself an authority on all racing matters. ‘I was on horseback and saw the Kingsclere lot polished off in the birdcage enclosure. Some of Sir Joseph’s were very firm, but I did not fancy them exactly. The race was run at a clinking pace, and it told so upon the field that at the bushes not more than four seemed to have a chance. There were not more than four in it when they came into the dip, and I saw the yellow and black cap in front. I made sure Ocean would win, but he was beaten by half a length on the post by Wildbird.’

‘By Jove!’ ejaculated the Earl of Sark, who was, or pretended to be, deeply interested in this recital.

‘The winner of the guineas is a fine horse,’ observed the marquis.

‘People always say that afterwards. What has he done, and what is he engaged in?’

‘He is a brown colt, by Adventurer out of Lady Nell, last year, ran second, carrying 8st. 7lb., beaten by half a length for the Hardwicke stakes at Stockton. At the same meeting he ran third for the Lambton plate. At York, August, he won the North of England Biennial by half a length, carrying 8st. 7lb. At Newmarket, second October meeting, he ran third for the Middle Park plate, carrying 8st. 13lbs. He is in the Epsom Derby, the Prince of Wales’ stakes, at Ascot, North Derby, Newcastle summer meeting, Great Northern St. Leger, Stockton, North of England Biennial, York August, Great Yorkshire stakes, Doncaster stakes, and Newmarket Derby.’

‘You seem to be well posted in the set hings,’ observed the Earl of Sark.

‘Oh, yes, I always make it a point to know what a horse has done.’

A young lady standing with her mother behind the two noblemen heard this conversation, and heaved a deep sigh.

It was Lady Marriette.

The marquis turned round suddenly, and, recognising her extended his hand, saying how sincerely glad he was to meet her; but Marriette was not very responsive, she thought he deserved cool treatment, and treated him coldly accordingly.

Lady Morton was much more civil to him; she knew what an eligible match it would be for her daughter to make. Men with forty thousand a year and a coronet are not to be met with every day.

The Marquis of Rackington did not dance; he liked to see people do so, but he did not care about it himself. Offering his arm to Marriette, they walked round the room.

‘You are very cool to-night,’ he said; ‘what have I done to deserve your displeasure?’

‘I do not know,’ answered Marriette.

Vague rumours of his indiscretion had reached her, but she did not know the extent of his wickedness and infidelity. The prudence of the two mammas had concealed that from her. She knew that he was going wrong; she felt that he was not so kind and attentive as he had been formerly. Every one admitted that Lady Marriette Morton was exquisitely lovely. She was fair, with a long delicate aristocratic face, beautiful eyes, and a pretty mouth and chin. There was grace in every movement; she dressed very well, and was the most charming girl in the room.

Rackington was proud of her and of her predilection for him, but he had an idea that he was too young to marry and settle down. ‘People don’t know their own minds at two-and-twenty,’ he said, ‘I must wait a year or two.’

Probably he would have done so, had not an occurrence taken place which made him jealous, and caused him to take an interest in Lady Marriette, which he had failed to feel before.

‘I have been away at Newmarket, or I should have called,’ remarked the marquis.

‘You are always away,’ she said, in a reproachful tone.

‘Not always.’

‘Lately, I mean.’

‘Well, yes. I have so much to attend to. Have you been dancing to-night?’

‘Yes, just before you came in, and that question reminds

me that I am engaged for the next waltz,' answered Marriette.

'To whom?'

'Oh, a nice man, who was introduced to me at Lady Coldegrave's the other night.'

'What is his name?'

'Here he comes to claim me; let him answer for himself.'

The marquis frowned.

He saw advancing to the girl he was supposed to love, a tall handsome man, who stared superciliously at him.

Who could he be?

'He is not in my set,' said the marquis to himself, 'or I should know him. Some outsider—some cad, I expect.'

CHAPTER V.

‘FASHIONABLE DISSIPATION.’

THE stranger bowed to Lady Marriette, and said, in a melodious voice—

‘I think this is my dance?’

‘I fancy it is, but I really don’t know. Mama has my card,’ replied Marriette.

‘If there is a doubt, may I have the benefit of it?’

‘Certainly.’

‘I presume Lady Morton is the keeper of your conscience?’

‘I have no secrets from my mother,’ she answered, with dignity.

The marquis stood by and took no part in this conversation. He tried to catch the stranger’s eye and wither him with a glance, but the stranger seemed to care more about looking at Marriette than at him.

‘I have ventured to send the horse to your stables,’ continued the stranger. ‘You remember our conversation about a quiet lady’s hack?’

‘Yes, perfectly. I am much obliged to you. What shall I call it? I like to give names to all my pets.’

‘I call it Interest, because the man who had it owes me money, and as he never paid a penny of the principal, he sent me this horse.’

Lady Marriette smiled, and showed her pretty teeth, and the music striking up, she took her friend’s arm, and with an inclination to Lord Rackington, went away to join the dancers.

Not feeling any inclination to watch the people who were enjoying themselves in the gay and festive scene, the marquis strolled into the card-room, where the host, the well-known Lord Redhill and Reigate, was playing whist, seated in a capacious arm-chair, *plena ipso*, comfortably filled by himself.

He looked on at the play for a little while, and was relieved when Ord Parker joined him and offered to bet, which he agreed to do.

They made wagers in a low tone upon the colour of the card which would be turned up, and upon the odd trick, until the marquis spoke so loudly, that Ord Parker was afraid Lord Redhill would hear him and be displeased, and refused to bet any more. He was then a winner of fifty pounds. So they went into the refreshment room, always an unfailing source of small talk and better spirits, produced by wine.

The stranger who had been dancing with Lady Marriette Morton was there, handing her an ice. Pointing him out, he exclaimed—

‘Do you know that fellow, Parker?’

Ord Parker put his glass to his eye, and scrutinized the stranger in an offensive manner, peculiar to himself, and in which art he was unrivalled. He would look at a man from head to foot, and take stock of him from his hair to his boots.

‘Oh, yes,’ he replied, ‘that is a man called Oatley. Lots of money; almost as well off as you are.’

‘Is he anybody—who is he? That’s what I want to know,’ demanded the little marquis, with impatience.

‘County family now. Father or grandfather in trade, I believe; made carpets or something.’

‘Oh! and that’s the man Marriette prefers to me?’ said Rackington, in a low tone.

‘What do you say?’ inquired Ord Parker.

‘Nothing. I am going.’

‘So soon?’

‘Yes; the place is so hot it stifles me.’

He wished Ord Parker good-night and went away, his brougham taking him home. He blamed Marriette for dancing and flirting with Mr. Oatley, which she did in an open manner, but forgot that it was entirely his fault. Had he not treated her with such marked neglect and coldness she would have done anything sooner than give him cause for a moment’s uneasiness. It was certainly his fault, and she was acting with proper spirit in trying to pique him; they were tacitly engaged, Marriette and the marquis, but no formal offer had been made by him for her hand, nor had he openly proposed to her mother for her. The affair had been arranged by the mothers. That was the fact, and they were so certain a year ago that everything was going smoothly, that they did not push the affair on at all, being content to let matters take their course, and trust to what time would bring forth.

Now they were growing alarmed and Lady Morton was pleased to encourage Mr. Oatley, who had twenty thousand a year and knew how to take care of it, which was more than could be said of Rackington. If the latter would not have Marriette at the last moment she could fall back upon Oatley. It was quite proper that she should have two strings to her bow. Being a little tified the marquis took up a book and tried to read. It was Burton’s anatomy. He was melancholy and he was glad of the chance of anatomising it, but he soon grew tired of this amusement. His cigar had burnt out, he lighted another and fancied himself weary of life. The earth was gross, and he wanted something brighter and better. It was Lamartine’s *mal du*

ciel, that heaven-sickness which often oppresses us when in low spirits; ultimately he took up Ruff's guide and was soon busy calculating his horses' chances.

The next day he called upon Lady Morton. Marriette was out, so he left his card and went away angry. In the Row where he went, after leaving the Morton's, he saw Marriette on horseback; with her was Mr. Oatley. The marquis favoured her with a stiff bow and rode on. She smiled and made Rackington furiously jealous.

'I'll cut that fellow out,' he said to himself; 'I'll see the countess and find out what his intentions are.'

He would have called again that day, but a note from Captain Craven called him in another direction. Craven wrote to tell him that he had been arrested on a bill of exchange for five hundred pounds, and not having the money at his command, had been taken to Bream's Buildings.

'Do come and see me?' the letter concluded, 'and if you can spare it, bring the money with you. I shall be in funds again in a day or two, but I don't want to stick in this hole.'

The marquis wondered where he should find Bream's Buildings. He rang for Randal, his valet and confidential servant, who was an excellent fellow, and worthy of the confidence reposed in him. When Randal came he asked him where Bream's Buildings were.

'Place for debtors, my lord,' answered Randal; 'charge a pound a day for accommodation. It saves you from going to Whitecross Street. I lived with a gentleman once, my lord, who went to Cursitor Street—that is where the old place used to be—lots of times. It's nothing when you're used to it.'

'Who was that?' asked the marquis.

‘Sir Philip Farrah, my lord. Ruined himself by backing horses. Worst game out, my lord, backing horses—making a book is the thing.’

‘How is that done?’ inquired the marquis, much amused.

‘Easiest thing in the world, my lord,’ answered Randal. ‘I generally make a hundred pound book with gentlemen of my acquaintance. The plan is to lay against every horse to a certain amount.’

‘You should have told Sir Philip Farrah that,’ said the marquis.

‘Ah, my lord, you didn’t know him,’ answered Randal, with a shake of the head. ‘He wasn’t like you. He went on the principle of keeping inferiors at a distance. He wouldn’t talk to a servant, not even if he was confidential. Oh! no. And now may I ask, my lord, who it is at the buildings?’

‘Captain Craven. I must go and get him out.’

‘A nice gentleman is Captain Craven, my lord; many a half-crown he has given me. If it his first visit you will find him sitting in a chair which looks down the passage. All the new comers do that. The first thing a man does when he is arrested is to send for his solicitor, and he sits in the position I have mentioned to watch the door. A new man always refuses dinner. He tells you he shall get out presently, and he is not hungry. They charge an exorbitant price for everything. I used to know the cook there, when I went to wait upon Sir Philip. The Fossil we called her, and she had a daughter a Bloomer.’

The marquis, with his usual generosity, went at once to see the imprisoned officer, and lent him the money necessary to obtain his discharge, with an alacrity that astonished the captain. Randal smiled as he visited the

place where he had been to see either his masters or their friends, whom unmerciful disaster followed fast, and he trusted that the Marquis of Rackington would never visit the gloomy abode on his own account.

When the captain obtained his liberation he borrowed another 'century' from the marquis, just to enable him to 'put things square' as he said, and they drove down to Greenwich and had whitebait to celebrate the event ; returning to town rather the worse for champagne, and running over a child in the Old Kent Road, laming it for life. The marquis gave his name and address to the enraged parents, and his solicitor had to pay a handsome sum to settle the matter. Captain Craven made a joke about the occurrence, and held that it ought to be legal to kill children as the population should be kept down, but he drove more carefully the rest of the way home nevertheless.

In the evening they went to a club notorious for its high play at whist, and the marquis in his leviathan style frightened everybody by the magnitude of his bets ; from the club they went to the Alhambra, and from thence they drove to the Favorita's in Brompton, the marquis having telegraphed to her to say he was coming, and to ask her to provide supper. Unfortunately the telegram, as is usual, we believe, with the London district companies, was not delivered until the next morning, and the Favorita was happily ignorant of the intended visit of the marquis and his friend.

It happened that when they arrived the Favorita was at supper with a friend. The servant opened the door, having received no instructions not to do so, and the marquis as usual walked into the dining-room. The Favorita uttered a tiny cry of surprise, mingled with alarm. Captain Craven stroked his moustache as he

stood on the threshold ; the marquis stopped half-way across the room, and the 'friend,' staring insolently at both of them, wiped his mouth with the corner of a napkin, and seemed to hesitate as to whether he should take up a bowl of lobster salad as a weapon of defence or not.

'Evie!' exclaimed the marquis, in the tone of a man who wants to ask a question.

The Favorita ran to him, and exclaimed with ready tact—

'Oh, so glad to see you, dear ! but why did you not send? Here is my cousin, just come up from——'

'Aldershot, I think, if I am speaking to Major Murray,' exclaimed Craven, with a mischievous twinkle in the eye.

'My name is Murray, and I am a major,' said the stranger.

'In the twenty —th?'

'Yes.'

'I thought so ; we met at Shorncliffe three years ago. My name is Craven, and, as a friend of Rackington's, I felt myself under an imperative obligation to recognise you.'

'Don't apologise, my dear fellow,' answered Major Murray, who was tall and handsome, with a profusion of hair on his face.

Favorita had gone very pale. She bit her lips, and her cheeks were pallid in spite of the rouge she had put on them with no sparing hand.

'You do not mind my having my cousin here, Harry, do you, dear?' she said, in a voice almost of supplication.

'If this gentleman is your cousin?' he replied.

'Do you doubt me?'

Major Murray rose from his chair, and walked up to the marquis, who was completely dwarfed beside him.

‘What is the dispute?’ he asked.

‘Are you this lady’s cousin?’ demanded the marquis.

‘Of course, I am.’

Captain Craven came up and said in a low voice to his friend—

‘He cannot compromise the woman. Sit down and have some wine, and when she goes to bed you can say what you like to Murray. It is always bad form to have a row with a woman in the place.’

‘Sit down, Harry dear,’ exclaimed the Favorita, wondering what the upshot of this unpleasant episode would be.

I am sure cousin Fred will go at once, if you don’t like him here.’

‘I for one will have some supper, with your permission,’ said Craven.

‘Do; there is a good fellow,’ she answered. ‘Help yourself to anything you like. Major Murray—cousin Fred, I mean—sit down, I will talk to Harry.’

The two men took seats at the table and began to talk about some trifle or the other.

Favorita wanted to say something to Rackington, but he stopped her, exclaiming—

‘You need not make any more excuses. It is all perfectly clear and straightforward. I will stay and have some supper, and then you can leave us to have a cigar and a glass of grog.’

‘You will quarrel!’ she exclaimed, holding up her hands.

‘Quarrel! with your cousin, too! how can you dream of such a thing? Let me lead you to the table.’

He did so; and, as he took her hand, felt her tremble

violently. The men made an effort to talk. Rackington pretended to eat, but hardly took anything. Favorita drank rather more champagne than was good for her, and was glad in about an hour to wish her guests good night and retire, hoping that nothing unpleasant would occur; leaving things to take their chance with that delightful facility of the happy-go-lucky order which belongs peculiarly to women.

‘Now, sir,’ exclaimed Rackington, ‘let us have a little conversation, if you please.’

‘With all my heart,’ answered Major Murray.

‘To men of the world, like Captain Craven and myself, it is apparent that you have fallen in with the pleasant fiction invented by the lady of this house.’

‘I don’t understand you.’

‘You are not her cousin.’

‘I think,’ said the major, ‘that I have already stated that I am her cousin.’

‘Yes.’

‘If you contradict that statement you accuse me of being guilty of a falsehood.’

‘Yes,’ said the marquis quietly.

‘In that case you insult me.’

‘Yes,’ replied the marquis, for the third time.

‘I demand satisfaction,’ said the major, rising.

‘It is I who should demand that,’ answered Rackington. ‘You come here, sir, under a false pretence, and you enjoy my hospitality with the most unblushing effrontery, for it can be no secret to you that I am the master of this house.’

‘I do not recognise you in the slightest degree,’ replied the major, with cool insolence.

‘At all events I request you to leave the house at once, and if you refuse to do so——’

'That is quite sufficient ; I am not in the habit of mixing myself up in vulgar brawls,' interrupted Major Murray. 'You are perfectly willing, I presume, to give me the satisfaction I want. We will fight with swords, and the first wound shall be considered the end of the encounter. That is, I believe, how these things are managed in Germany.'

'I consent to that,' said the marquis.

'I think,' observed Captain Craven, 'that the arrangement will be highly satisfactory to all parties. If Major Murray will depute some friend to call upon me at the Junior United Service Club to-morrow morning, we can arrange the details at the Junior.'

'Yes.'

'I will do so,' replied Major Murray, who put on his hat cavalierly, and left the room without another word.

When the street-door had slammed behind him, the marquis exclaimed—

'I wish I had kicked the fellow.'

'He was too big to kick,' observed Craven, 'and one can't go about in these days with black eyes.'

'Suppose I kill him.'

'No one is killed in these duels.'

'He might kill me. It is a strange adventure. Come, have some more wine, and let us be going.'

In a few minutes Captain Craven expressed himself ready to go, and the marquis, who suddenly sat down at a writing-table, begged him to be good enough to wait while he scribbled a few lines.

He wrote on a sheet of paper, in a large, scrawling hand peculiar to him—

'You cannot expect any consideration from me after what has happened to-night. If you want money call upon

Mr. Hawkes, with whom I will arrange to pay your debts. As for yourself, I never wish to meet you again. I cannot forgive people who once deceive me.'

He folded this up, put it in an envelope, and, ringing the bell, said to the servant who answered the summons—

'Give this to your mistress in the morning,, adding to Craven, 'Now I am ready.'

They drove away in the brougham together.

'Can't we make a night of it somewhere? I don't feel at all in the humour to go to bed,' exclaimed the marquis.

'It is too late,' answered Captain Craven.

'Come to my house and play at something ; anything for excitement.'

'I have no objection,' said Craven, who saw his way to making a few hundreds.

He never refused to turn an honest penny, and here was a very advantageous way of increasing the balance at his banker's, which he did to the tune of a monkey before the clock struck four.

CHAPTER VI.

‘THE DUEL WITH SWORDS.’

WHEN Captain Craven left the Marquis of Rackington’s house in Grosvenor Square he made an appointment for the morning, and promised to attend carefully to the affair of the duel.

Neither anticipated that life would be lost. They thought the duel would create a sensation when it was known, and get talked about in certain circles. It had always been the opinion of the marquis that the abolition of duelling in this country was a fatal mistake, for now a gentleman had no means of obtaining redress for his wounded honour but in a police court.

When he rose, which was about ten o’clock, he dressed with the assistance of Randal, and eating part of a grilled fowl, and drinking half a bottle of chablis, Rackington went to Bruton Street. Hawkes was within and engaged, but he did not keep the marquis waiting. He left whoever it was with whom he had been closeted, and going into the drawing-room, shook hands cordially with his visitor.

The marquis ingenuously told him what had happened at the Favorita’s, and informed him of the duel he intended to fight.

Mr. Hawkes looked grave.

‘As regards the woman,’ he exclaimed, ‘that perhaps is as well broken off. It was with some regret that I saw you form an attachment in that quarter, but I knew it would fall to pieces of its own accord in time. The duel is a more serious matter. Can you fence?’

‘Oh, yes, I learnt to fence at Eton. Angelo taught me.’

‘Possibly this major is an adept in the art. You must have Dr. Garner with you.’

‘Who is Dr. Garner?’

‘He happened to be in the next room with me when you called. It is very fortunate that he should have been in town, for he travels about a good deal, and is here to-day and gone to-morrow. The doctor will teach you one or two important passes, and you will find his eye of great service to you.’

‘His eye?’ echoed the marquis in surprise.

‘Yes, they say he has the evil eye. It is a superstition of the Italians. There is much truth in it, nevertheless. I never yet met any one who could withstand Garner’s eye.’

‘Would not his presence enable me to take an unfair advantage of my adversary.’

‘Not at all. You must not be scrupulous. We cannot have you disabled and laid up in the height of the racing season. Stay a moment, I will call Garner.’

Mr. Hawkes was gone a couple of minutes, and returned with a spare, short, *bizarre*-looking man, whose bronzed complexion gave one the idea that he had lived long abroad; his hair was crisp and curly, and he certainly had the most marvellous black eyes that were ever seen out of a snake’s head.

‘Dr. Garner,’ exclaimed Mr. Hawkes, ‘is very willing to attend you in his professional capacity, and with him you will be perfectly safe.’

‘I am much indebted to the doctor for his good nature,’ said the marquis.

A servant entered.

‘Did you ring?’ inquired Hawkes.

‘Yes, I took the liberty. I want some of your champagne, the Mumm I think will be soft and nice so early in the day,’ answered the marquis.

Some champagne was brought of the brand indicated by the marquis, and he and Dr. Garner got into conversation. He found Garner a well-educated, pleasant man to talk to, quite a man of the world, but as he talked he could not help feeling the influence of his wonderful eye, which seemed to pierce him through, and make him tremble in spite of himself.

Rackington had made an appointment at Angelo’s fencing school in St. James’s Street, and he asked the doctor to accompany him, which he consented to do.

They got into the brougham together and were driven off. Captain Craven had not arrived, and Dr. Garner asked the marquis to have a bout with the foils.

In the first encounter Rackington was buttoned ; in the second he was disarmed.

‘This will not do,’ said the doctor gravely ; ‘I must teach you a few little tricks. Will you learn ?’

‘With pleasure,’ rejoined the marquis.

In about half-an-hour Dr. Garner had taught his pupil four rapid feints and passes which he did not doubt would be of the utmost service to him.

When Captain Craven arrived he announced that he had seen Major Murray’s second, and arranged that the duel should take place that evening at six, in the sitting-room at the hotel at which the major was staying. Each party to bring his own sword, which must be of a uniform length and shape. The first blood drawn to end the contest. If the antagonists were not satisfied they might fight again, but with fresh seconds.

‘Very well,’ exclaimed Dr. Garner ; ‘at a quarter-past

six all will be over. I hope you two gentlemen will honour me with your company to dinner at the Travellers' Club at seven, for I shall invite our mutual friend Hawkes, and we shall make up a party of four, the most agreeable number I can think of at dinner.'

'But suppose—' began the marquis.

'I shall do nothing of the sort. I am a magician, and I know perfectly well what will happen; and now to kill time until six.'

'Shall I drive you somewhere?' asked Rackington.

'Certainly not. I must not have your arm fatigued, that will never do. You must be kept perfectly quiet.'

Rackington shrugged his shoulders, and, with a smile, said—

'Do with me as you like, I am in your hands.'

'My little steam yacht is at Kew; come down there, and we will have an hour on the river,' suggested the doctor.

This was agreed to; a pair of thoroughbreds quickly took the party to Kew. The captain of the yacht expecting its owner that day had the steam up, and they made a pleasant trip to Richmond and back again.

It was striking six as they returned to town and drew up before the door of the hotel. Dr. Garner carried something wrapped up in leather.

It was a sword of the finest London manufacture.

'Be calm, and keep yourself cool; wait till your opportunity comes, and then remember what I told you this morning,' said the doctor in an undertone to the marquis.

Major Murray was rather pale, he had been writing. Rising as the gentlemen entered, he bowed, and looked curiously at the doctor.

'Dr. Garner, my medical attendant,' exclaimed the marquis.

The major bowed a second time.

Suddenly a shiver for which he could not account ran through him.

The eye of the mysterious doctor was fixed upon him.

Directly it was removed the shivering ceased.

Captain Craven spoke a few words to Captain Dacres, who was Major Murray's second, and then, turning the key in the lock of the door, recounted the terms upon which the duel was to be fought.

At the first effusion of blood on either side hostilities were to cease immediately.

This being perfectly understood, the blinds were drawn down, so that the setting sun streaming in through the windows might not interfere with either of the combatants.

At a sign from the doctor the marquis began to strip, and soon stood in his shirt sleeves, the right one being tucked up to the elbow. He looked very agile and graceful, but his adversary in sheer physical strength and brute force was incomparably his superior. He seemed to be able to break down his opponent's guard by strength alone, but then the marquis was the more nimble of the two.

Major Murray could handle his sword with remarkable dexterity; sword exercise had always been a favourite amusement of his. A confident smile sat on his lips as he put himself on guard.

A strange fascination compelled him to look at the doctor, who, whether by design or accident, had placed himself behind Rackington.

Twice their eyes met, and twice Major Murray trembled as if with a shock of ague.

He beckoned to his second as he let fall his sword.

'Give me a glass of brandy,' he exclaimed.

It was brought him.

‘It is very odd,’ he said, as he drained the glass; ‘it is the middle of summer, and I shake as if with the cold.’

‘I never knew you do so before,’ answered Dacres.

‘The look of that man is insupportable to me.’

‘Who is that?’

‘The doctor. That West Indian sort of man.’

‘Ah!’ ejaculated Captain Dacres.

The major trembled again.

‘That man’s look turns my blood to ice,’ said he.

‘To work, gentlemen, time presses,’ exclaimed Captain Craven.

Major Murray put himself on guard again.

‘Make short work of it, and pink him neatly on the arm or the thigh,’ whispered Dacres.

The major nodded.

The swords clashed as the combatants saluted.

Although Dr. Garner was ten or a dozen yards off, the major felt him throw the evil eye, as it were, upon him. A stream of magnetic influence rushed upon him with irresistible power, and paralyzed his action.

‘I can fence with any man in the British army,’ he said to himself, ‘but to-day I can scarcely make a simple lunge in carte.’

They fought for several minutes without touching one another. The play was very pretty indeed. Major Murray grew impatient; he exerted his strength and beat down the guard of the young marquis as if he had been playing at single stick, but each time when he was going to avail himself of the advantage he had gained, the eye of the doctor fell upon him, and he missed his aim.

‘The devil seize that man,’ he muttered.

Then he parried a thrust in tierce, and lunged violently; the thrust was parried in its turn. The marquis’s foot

slipped, he lost his guard, and the major took a step forward and shortened his sword.

He trembled fearfully at the critical moment.

His sword lay useless in his hand; he could not use it. Some strange influence possessed him, and impeded his movements.

The marquis rallied, and darting forward slipped through his opponent's guard, and skilfully ran him through the side of the neck, spitting him like a lark.

As he withdrew his sword the major uttered a cry, and sank on the ground covered with blood.

Dr. Garner was by his side in a moment, as were the seconds.

Rackington folded his arms, and looked on with apparent unconcern.

The doctor examined the wound, and asked the second to assist in taking the wounded man to bed. This was easily done, the bed-room he occupied adjoining the sitting-room, and being accessible by means of folding-doors.

Pouring some water into a basin, and using a sponge, Dr. Garner bathed the wound, and applied some lint and strapping which he carried with him.

‘It is nothing much,’ he exclaimed. ‘His neck will be stiff for a month, but he is not dangerously hurt. Keep him in bed till I give orders for him to get up. It will be best for me to attend him. To-morrow I shall call early. Let him have no stimulants, and be free from excitement if you please.’

These remarks were addressed to Captain Dacres, who was much concerned on behalf of his friend.

When all this was done, he with Craven rejoined the marquis.

‘Is he in danger?’ demanded the latter.

‘Not at all. He has fainted with the pain, but the hurt is not dangerous.’

‘Let us go to dinner then,’ said the marquis.

‘I second that motion with all my heart,’ replied the doctor, looking at his watch, and adding. ‘It is five-and-twenty minutes past the hour. The affair took a few minutes more than I anticipated, but we shall not keep Hawkes waiting.’

When they were seated in the brougham, the doctor said, ‘So you think you did that very cleverly?’

‘Yes,’ answered the marquis.

‘It was not you. It was through me.’

The marquis shrugged his shoulders.

‘If I had not fixed my eye upon him when you slipped you would have been lying in his place. Take my word for that.’

And Dr. Garner laughed drily.

CHAPTER VII.

‘MARRIETTE HAS HER CHOICE.’

ALTHOUGH the duel was scarcely spoken about, the details oozed out, and a paragraph appeared in a daily paper, which was copied into others, and it soon became notorious that the Marquis of Rackington had fought a duel with Major Murray, whom he wounded slightly on the neck.

This increased the public interest in him, and made him a still greater favourite with the ladies than he was already.

Two days after the duel the marquis called on Lady Morton and found her at home.

Her ladyship was rather cooler in her manner than was her wont ordinarily.

‘I feel inclined to thank you for your visit,’ she exclaimed, you so seldom call now. Your good lady-mother was here yesterday.’

‘Is Marriette in?’

‘No; she is not. Marriette went out riding with Mr. Oatley.’

There was a mischievous twinkle in Lady Morton’s eye as she said this.

‘Who is this man Oatley?’ inquired the marquis, with an annoyance he did not attempt to conceal.

‘Oh! a very nice gentlemanly man. Harrow and Oxford, I think. He is in the Blues. Have you not met? You must be introduced. You would like him so much.’

‘I have not the slightest wish to make his acquaintance.’

‘Have you not?’

‘I am not ambitious of the honour.’

Lady Morton smiled.

She could see, with her woman’s tact, that the marquis was getting jealous, and her experience in affairs of the heart and match-making generally, told her that nothing made a man propose so quickly as a little jealousy judiciously provoked.

‘Marriette is at an age when she ought to get settled,’ continued her ladyship.

‘She is still in her *première jeunesse*.’

‘That is so, but now-a-days girls so soon get *en retour*. If she likes Mr. Oatley, and he likes her, what can I say?’

‘His grandfather sold carpets,’ exclaimed the marquis, sarcastically.

‘Made them. He was what is called a manufacturer, I believe, in commercial circles. He can endow a wife well; his income is large, and I do not see why he should not be considered an eligible *parti*.’

‘Do you not? in that case I fear I cannot congratulate you upon your usual good taste.’

‘No? You will make me so miserable. Please reconsider your harsh determination.’

Rackington bit his lips.

‘I came here to-day,’ he said, ‘to tell you, Lady Morton, that I love your daughter; but if this half-and-half carpet fellow, who is nobody knows who, is to step in between me and what my mother has always led me to believe was the darling wish of your heart, then I have nothing more to say.’

‘It was so. That is to say, I wished you to be the husband of my child.’

‘Am I to understand you no longer wish it?’

His voice trembled a little with anxiety.

‘I am in doubt,’ answered the countess.

‘As to what?’

‘Excuse me for speaking plainly,’ said the Countess of Morton. ‘But when so important a subject as matrimony is under consideration, it is criminal folly to remain silent. I am in doubt whether I should consult my child’s happiness in giving her to you.’

‘Why?’ he asked, in a dry voice.

‘People will talk, and some good-natured friend of yours told me something about an establishment in Brompton. Now I——’

‘It is all at an end.’

‘You give me your word?’

‘Certainly.’

‘That is sufficient,’ exclaimed the countess; ‘Marriette will be home directly; I expect her every minute. I will give her her choice, and I think I know pretty well what her decision will be; you were always her favourite.’

The face of the marquis flushed with pleasure.

‘Will you kindly exert your powerful influence on my behalf?’ he said.

‘With the greatest pleasure.’

‘I am afraid I have been a bad boy,’ he continued, with a smile. ‘But I will promise not to be naughty any more, and will see how good I can be.’

‘Wild oats, that is all,’ said the countess; ‘you cannot put old heads on young shoulders.’

How Rackington carried out his determination, Lady Marriette found to her cost eventually.

Some further conversation took place and then Marriette came in. Mr. Oatley accompanied her to the door but he

did not come in, as he had some business to attend to in another part of the town.

‘That must be the dear child,’ exclaimed the Countess of Morton, as she heard the horses’ stop at the door.

With a smile and a nod, meant to reassure the marquis, she left the room and met Marriette in her riding-habit on the stairs.

‘What a colour you have, dear ; you are quite flushed !’ said the countess.

‘Am I? Come with me to my room, mamma, and I will tell you why,’ answered Marriette.

Mother and daughter ascended the stairs together.

Throwing her hat, whip, and gloves, upon the bed, Marriette said—

‘Oatley has asked me.’

‘Indeed, I did not expect it so soon,’ said the Countess of Morton, in surprise. ‘What answer did you make him? I hope you were ambiguous ; I hope you remembered what I told you.’

‘Very well indeed. I said we had known one another so short a time that I scarcely knew my own mind ; I would think—I would search my heart—I would consult you.’

‘Is that all?’

‘Not quite. He will come in three days for an answer, until that time we are to wait.’

‘Shall I tell you what answer to make him?’

‘Yes.’

‘You must tell him No.’

‘But—really mama,’ said Marriette in some perplexity, ‘I am rather at a loss to understand——’

‘I will make it all as plain as the sun to you. Mr. Oatley,’ said Lady Morton, ‘is nice, I grant you that, and

in the absence of any one better would do. I want you to become Marchioness of Rackington.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Marriette, 'that would be better, but is there any chance of it? And then again he seems so altered, so fast. You know what I mean.'

'He intends to turn over a new leaf, he told me so.'

'When?'

'This morning.'

'Is he here?' inquired Marriette.

'In the drawing-room, and he has made me a formal proposal for you. I contrived very skilfully to make him jealous of Oatley, and he has discovered that he wants you, he cannot be happy without you.'

'What shall I do?' asked Marriette, blushing in sweet confusion.

'Change your dress and go down to him.'

'Ring for my maid then, please.'

The countess did so.

'Let him propose and go through the usual thing you know,' continued her mother, 'and after all, tell him you will have him; fix the day if you like. There is nothing like getting these things done quickly. It is a bad brood that is long hatching, and men are wretchedly fickle.'

Marriette proceeded to change her dress, and the operation with the maid's assistance was soon accomplished.

She went downstairs looking very lovely.

Pausing a moment ere she entered the drawing-room door, she murmured—

'I suppose I am doing right; mamma sanctions the course I am pursuing, but I know it will break Tom Oatley's heart.'

She heaved a deep sigh and entered.

CHAPTER VIII.

'THE SPIDER.'

THE interview that ensued between the Marquis of Rackington and Marriette Morton settled the fate of both of them. He proposed and she accepted him then and there, though she had that very morning as good as told Tom Oatley that, subject to her mother's consent, she would have him, as she liked him better than any other man she knew.

But then it must be remembered she did not know that she could have the Marquis of Rackington for the asking.

Three months afterwards they were married.

The marquis exulted. He had taken violent personal hatred to Oatley, and he positively gloated over his conquest. Oatley was very much cut up as Marriette had said he would be; he took care to let every one know how badly she had treated him, and vowed that he would be revenged.

Rackington had now several horses that were favourably mentioned in the betting for small events, and notably two horses—Lady Jane and the Peer, which were favourably mentioned for the Derby which was to be run in a year and a half's time.

It was now November and the marquis determined to travel during the winter months with his bride, and left his affairs in the hands of Mr. Hawkes. He had spent all the money which had accumulated during the time he came of age, and was living up to his income. It only required a few disastrous losses on the turf to make him borrow money.

Being naturally of an indolent and reckless disposition, the marquis left everything to Mr. Hawkes, whom he regarded as a thoroughly reliable and trustworthy person.

Hawkes engaged a trainer named Dale, and arranged training quarters on the Halstead Castle estate, near Market Harborough.

The Peer and Lady Jane were nearly two years old, and gave their owner and his friends the most extravagant anticipations respecting them. They were the most promising among the entries for the Derby, and at that early stage the knowing ones among the book-makers began to back them.

Mr. Oatley thought that the best and most efficacious way in which he could annoy and distress the marquis would be by starting a stud of his own, and buying the most likely horses he could get hold of.

It happened that there was a couple of two-year old horses belonging to a well-known racing gentleman, about which all who had seen them were as sanguine as the Halstead party were about the Peer and Lady Jane.

These were Braemar and Decside.

Oatley went one day to their owner, and asked him what he wanted for them.

The owner, without the slightest hesitation, said twelve thousand pounds.

Mr. Thomas Oatley gave him a cheque on the spot for the horses, the entries were changed so that his name appeared as the owner of them, and he commenced to train them for a few important two-year old races. They had undergone a very careful preparation already, and there was every probability of their being sent to the post perfectly fit for any race for which they were entered.

The public began to take an interest in this approaching Derby. It is true that they had to wait ~~about~~ eighteen

months, as one had to intervene, but the romantic story of the marquis's marriage, and the odd revenge for the slight shown him by Lady Marriette, which Mr. Oatley had mapped out for himself, roused the expectancy of every one.

The favourite for the intervening Derby was Saddlegirth, and the marquis, who considered himself a judge of horses by this time, expressed his determination of standing by him through thick and thin ; and he did stick to him through good and evil report, all through the winter, which was one of the dreariest and most uneventful on record.

Mr. Hawkes had a very bad name. There was no denying it. Everybody who knew London at all, or London life, would have told a young man to do anything rather than get into Hawkes' clutches. He had ruined many men. A few, after being hopelessly ruined, had committed suicide, but what did that matter to a man like Reginald Hawkes ? If he lent his money at cent. per cent., the law allowed him to do so. It was perfectly legitimate, and he could afford to defy public opinion.

There are a set of men about London who get a living by introducing business to bill discounters. These are generally broken-down army men, or men who have been kicked out of Government offices through their own misconduct. They may be called the jackals who hunt for the lions. Even the jackals did not much care about taking their clients to Reginald Hawkes. He was so great a vampire. A man named Sellars, who had once been in a good position, had met the young Earl of Sark, whom he saw at the ball where the Marquis of Rackington was. Mr. Oatley, and had his jealousy aroused. Sellars found out that Sark wanted money, and he took him to Hawkes,

who spun his web immediately, emmeshed him, and then sucked him. Sark determined to back Saddlegirth for the Derby. His set told him it was a good thing, and his credit being good in the ring, he stood to lose a hundred thousand over the horse, and win a quarter of a million at least. It was a final effort; if he lost he was actually ruined and done for. Hawkes had security on all his property, and he could sell him up and burst the bubble at any moment, but Hawkes chose to wait. If Saddlegirth won the Derby, all well and good. Mr. Hawkes would get his cent. per cent. without selling the property, and he could go on again, for the young earl was sure to continue to plunge. A man who once imbibes a taste for betting and backing horses seldom, if ever, leaves off until he is hopelessly smashed up, and reduced to the condition of a pauper, and sometimes that of a fraudulent bankrupt.

Sellars was paid handsomely for the introduction, and sold his friend into the hands of the enemy very much as Judas may in olden days have taken the thirty pieces of silver for a like transaction, for we shall show by the melancholy end of the Earl of Sark that it was blood-money.

Sark found out, when it was too late, into what terrible hands he had fallen, but though he had struggled bravely to extricate himself he could not do so. His only hope was that Saddlegirth might win the Derby. He staked all with magnificent recklessness on the final throw. If the horse was not the first to pass the winning post it would matter little to Mr. Hawkes; he was secured, as he always took very good care to be.

The Marquis of Rackington had not passed a very happy six months with his wife. He found her exacting and anxious for a sentimental expression of love, which he was

not prepared to give her. They found, when it was too late, as hundreds of others have discovered, that they were unsuited to one another. Every one envied the marquis his lovely wife, but he wearied of her and sought recreation in other society, which he would have blushed to mention to her.

He came back to England in the spring, and met the Earl of Sark, who had heard his name mentioned at Mr. Hawkes' house. He thought it would only be friendly on his part to mention what had taken place with regard to himself, what an extortionate price Hawkes charged, and what an inexorable creditor he was.

The marquis thanked him for his information, but refused to think Hawkes unworthy of his confidence. Hawkes was a man of whom he had the highest possible opinion, and he would not hear anything to his prejudice.

Mr. Hawkes belonged to what was called the clever division. He was well acquainted with all the large bookmakers, who to a great measure control market operations and the turf generally. Most of them employ the best trainers to train a few horses for them, and thus gain an insight into the capabilities of the crack horses of the year.

Mr. Dale, the trainer of the Marquis of Rackington at Halstead, had not dared to do this yet, but he was only waiting until he got more into Mr. Hawkes' debt, to do more as he liked.

The marquis had yet to learn that betting has nothing to do with the merits of race-horses. A gentleman may possess a good horse, who has been at the head of the club quotations for weeks or months, but he can't win unless the large bookmakers permit it. If the owner is not in the power of the Leviathan the trainer is, or the

jockey is to be got at. How long ago is it since a jockey received a thousand pounds for pulling a horse that could have won the Epsom Derby?

It was well known that the Marquis of Rackington had backed Saddlegirth for the Derby with a characteristic recklessness, and that he would be a very heavy loser if that horse was not first past the post.

One day he received a strangely written letter from one of his stable lads at Halstead, to whom he had once done an act of kindness; the boy had not forgotten, though it had slipped his lordship's memory long ago. He began—

‘MI LORDE,

‘I see as you is baggin of Sadelgurth for the Darbee. I should like 2 hoffer myself as candate for an inteveaw insted of correspondence for I could give you more piticilars if we met my lord markis. I am ancous that you shall bag no more Sadelgurth which is a rank badd ors and can't sta the distans, tho the nuse paper do say he is a klippur. Mi Lorde, bett agins Sadelgurth awl you can git onn—he is a duff fur—I knows it. Mak thinks cumfurable over im for to lay agins is a littel incom for life, so no more my Lorde at this presint from your obedyent, umbel survun, littel Dic, they kals me.’

The marquis was highly amused at this singular specimen of orthography. The lad exhibited a strange disregard of spelling and punctuation, but it showed that he liked his young master, and wished to save him a loss if possible.

He showed the letter to Mr. Hawkes, telling that gentleman to send the lad a sovereign, which he promised to do and laughed at the epistle as if he considered it a good joke; but he nevertheless wrote to Dale, the trainer,

the following day, telling him to discharge a lad in the stable called Little Dick, who was forthwith discharged without knowing why, and went back to his original pastime of bird-flapping in the fields.

Mr. Hawkes considered so precocious a child dangerous. He felt satisfied that Saddlegirth would not win the Derby, though the public were rushing madly on him. In fact, he had private reasons for laying all he conveniently could against him.

‘Seriously, Hawkes,’ said the marquis, after talking about little Dick, ‘is there anything wrong with the crack?’

‘Nothing whatever, my lord,’ answered Hawkes. ‘If there had been I should have heard. I have a friend in the stable who would tell me directly if he went amiss. Take my word for it, he is as sound as a roach and as good as gold. I only hope our horses in a year or two will be in as fine a condition.’

‘I hope so, I am sure,’ said the marquis.

‘Lady Jane is a wonder.’

‘And the Peer?’

‘A model. They will make a stir before long,’ said Mr. Hawkes, rubbing his hands gleefully.

While they were talking Dale, the trainer, who had run up from Halstead for a day, was announced.

‘Ah, Dale—how do?’ exclaimed Hawkes.

Mr. Dale bowed to the marquis and shook hands with Hawkes.

‘What’s going on? anything new?’ continued Hawkes.

‘No, sir,’ replied Dale. ‘I can report all well.’

‘I have a theory of my own,’ said the marquis, ‘about young horses, Dale, and I don’t want my two-year-olds overworked. Dozens upon dozens of big colts have been

ruined by being stripped in their babyhood each recurring year.'

Mr. Dale smiled.

'You don't agree with me?' said the marquis.

'No, my lord, I can't say that I believe we are developing two-year-olds at the cost of their subsequent excellence.'

'Our forcing system gives us a crop of brilliant youngsters, and that is all.'

'Wait till you win a few of the big races, my lord,' said the trainer, with a smile. 'Lady Jane will soon be fit to run for a man's life.'

'I would rather put the pen through her name for all her two-year-old engagements than have her system too severely tried. Forcing horses will deteriorate the breed.'

The marquis spoke in the opinionated manner peculiar to young men who are theorists.

'I really must beg leave to differ with you,' exclaimed Mr. Hawkes.

'On what ground?'

'Look at our thoroughbred steeple-chase horses. They have proved that they can gallop four-and-a-quarter miles at Liverpool in eleven minutes or less, jumping included. Is there any falling off there?'

'Perhaps not, but I adhere to my theory.'

'Look again at the eight hundred thoroughbreds that Newmarket boasts, and the three or four thousand race-horses now in training; don't you think they are better than the horses of twenty years ago?'

'From what I have heard, I must candidly confess I do not.'

'Look at the prices horses command now. Did not Mr. Oatley give 12,000*l.* for Braemar and Dec-side?'

‘There was a little pique about that,’ answered the marquis, with a smile.

‘I grant you that we ought perhaps to look upon that as an exceptional price.’

‘I would give that sum for one horse if I thought it would annoy Oatley,’ said the marquis. ‘But to return to our original argument. The Jockey Club should forbid two-year-olds to be stripped before the first of May.’

‘Then numbers of men would not train horses at all.’

‘So much the better. Weed out the small fry, who are, to a man, in the power of the book-makers. Captain Craven was giving me an insight into turf morality the other day, and he agrees with me that the enormous number of four and five furlong races should be diminished, as the multitude of our race meetings is calculated to deteriorate the race-horse. I shall bring something of this sort before the Jockey Club in the autumn.’

There was a pause.

Mr. Hawkes had never known the marquis so profound, and he was glad of an opportunity to talk about something else.’

‘Are they standing Saddlegirth in your part of the country?’ he asked, addressing Dale.

‘Yes, we back public form and follow the money. I saw Saddlegirth’s jockey last week, and he says it’s a moral for the stable,’ answered the trainer.

‘That’s a mistake,’ exclaimed the marquis. ‘Rous said before a committee of the House once, that any man who followed the advice of his jockey is sure to be ruined, and the admiral is a good judge.’

‘So he is, my lord, but those in the stable ought to know something.’

‘Perhaps. I am content to back Saddlegirth heavily,

and I hope and trust he will win. In the meantime don't overtrain my horse, Dale; you know very well, that one-third of the runners in the Alexandra plate, at Ascot, break down every year.'

'With regard to betting,' remarked Hawkes, 'it is always as well to remember Crutch Robinson's maxim, "Never lay without limit against any horse, however bad, unless you hold the key of the stable."' '

'You agree with Dale, then, that those about the horse ought to know his merits.'

'Certainly, my lord.'

'But you want to know a horse's comparative merits, and how far he is good as compared with those he is matched against and will meet in the field. The trainer ought to be a man whose opinion is reliable, but God preserve me from ever committing the absurdity—the fatal folly, I may call it—of trusting the judgment of touts.'

So the conversation went on.

Mr. Hawkes brought out some wine, and his lordship having satisfied himself that all was well with Lady Jane and the Peer, went down to Tattersall's, and backed them each for a cool thousand.

The Derby approached, and during the season his lordship had varying luck. He went down to Halstead at Whitsuntide, and had a party of friends. He had promised to hunt the Quorn during the ensuing season, and the midland squires were glad to see him amongst them. His party included Farr Fowler, Ord Parker, Captain Craven and Sir Sutton Courtney, his *alter ego*, his Damon, his Orestes and inseparable companion. Craven lost very heavily over the Chester Cup, and could not manage to meet his engagements.

With his accustomed generosity, the Marquis of Rack-

ington came to his assistance, and lent him a few thousands just to help him out of his difficulties.

He was a good deal in the hands of the Jews, who held a council together, and came to the determination to arrest him, thinking that if they did so his friends and relations would, to save him the disgrace of going through the court, pay his debts for him. Ballystir, the great German Street discounter, was of this opinion, and accordingly a *ca. sa.* was issued, and Captain Craven placed in durance vile. He wrote to Rackington telling him that several detainers were lodged against him, and that he could not hope to get out under ten thousand, concluding a pathetic letter with, "God only knows what I am to do."

The marquis resolved to consult Mr. Hawkes.

This was an important matter, involving a large sum, and he decided not to trust his independent judgment in the matter.

'It is all nonsense, my lord,' said Mr. Hawkes, 'for these men to think they can do as they like with you. Don't be offended at my plain speaking.'

'Not in the least,' answered the marquis.

'You may go on paying the debts of a man like this Captain Craven to all eternity. Take my advice and don't do it.'

'What then?'

'Let him go through the court.'

'That will involve much unpleasantness, will it not? I am told that he will have to wait in Whitecross Street, as a non-trader, for two months.'

'Let us make him a trader,' said Mr. Hawkes; 'you have bought horses from him, so have others; we will call him a horse dealer. That makes him a trader at once. He can be so described.'

‘Yes.’

‘Then he can petition *in formâ pauperis* to save the stamps on the petition, the court fees, and——’

‘No, no. We can’t let him do that. Besides, he has a little money of his own,’ interrupted the marquis. ‘He is not quite the pauper you want to make him out.’

‘That is immaterial. When he has been adjudicated bankrupt, as a matter of course he will go back to prison, and there make an application for his release under the 112th section of the Bankruptcy Act, 1849. We must get at his execution creditor, square and make him friendly, and get him to send his release to the gaol. He can then walk out and surrender to his bankruptcy if he pleases. The whole thing can be done in a few days.’

‘I don’t like to shunt an old friend like that,’ said the marquis.

‘You save your money, my lord, and he is none the worse.’

‘In character and reputation he is.’

‘That is a fallacy. Excuse me, but it is indeed,’ said Mr. Hawkes. ‘People think nothing of going through now. You do not remember the white-washing there used to be in the “Gentleman’s Court,” in Portugal Street, when insolvent debtors used to appear periodically.’

The marquis shook his head

‘Look at the brothers of the Duke of Scarborough. They are always before the registrar, first one and then another; and between us, I may tell you that the duke himself is in Queer Street. His bills are all over the nation. I have a hatful of his paper, and would be glad to get rid of it at a loss of ten per cent.’

‘I think I shall get Craven out,’ said Rackington.

‘You will please yourself, my lord. If you have the money to waste it is no business of mine. You asked my advice; I have given it you, and it would be impertinence on my part to say anything more.’

‘That’s just the thing. I haven’t got the money,’ replied the marquis, in some confusion.

Mr. Hawkes looked stolidly into the fireplace.

He was a good hand at not taking a hint when it answered his purpose to be obtuse.

‘The fact is, Hawkes, I want to borrow it from you. I can give you a charge on some of my property, if you require it.’

‘Oh, no, my lord, that is not necessary,’ exclaimed Mr. Hawkes; ‘give me your acceptance, that will do. Do you want the money now?’

‘Yes, the sooner we get Craven out the better. What do you think?’

Hawkes shrugged his shoulders.

‘Shall I draw the bill?’ he said presently.

‘As you like,’ answered Rackington, smoking hurriedly, and creating a dense cloud in front of him.

The bill was drawn and accepted. Of course Hawkes put on the interest and charged his own price; the marquis never thought of quarrelling over his per-centage.

In the evening Captain Craven was a free man, and going to the ‘Rag,’ boasted openly that he could twist Rackington round his little finger. He could do just as he pleased with him. Rackington was the biggest fool out, and so on. The fact being that the marquis was a good-hearted generous fellow, with a noble heart, who ought to have been kept away from such men as he was mixed up with, and who were not fit to tie his shoe-strings.

Saddlegirth's Derby will long be remembered as one of the greatest disappointments on record.

The public, in its usual fatuous way, had emptied its coffers to pile gold on the favourite, just as they did a year later with Lady Jane.

Saddlegirth was beaten on the post by a neck.

The Marquis of Rackington lost upwards of fifty thousand pounds, which he could not afford, but which he paid, raising the money by mortgaging his estates to Reginald Hawkes.

The Earl of Sark was totally ruined, as he had all along known he should be, if Saddlegirth lost the Derby; and finding that he had nothing left to live for, he determined to commit suicide; but before he carried this terrible resolve into execution, he had an interview with Hawkes, his principal creditor.

To show the nature of the man, we will relate what passed during the time they were together.

The earl entered looking rather crestfallen, and took a chair, as Hawkes did not ask him to sit down.

'Well, my lord, what is it? Time's precious, and time's money, you know,' exclaimed Hawkes, almost rudely.

'I know it,' answered Sark, 'and I am sorry to say I have more of one than the other.'

'Of time?'

'Exactly.'

'What can I do for you?'' inquired the bill discounter, making use of an empty phrase, which was often on his lips.

'A great deal, Hawkes, if you like,' answered the earl, in a voice which shook a little. 'You can save my life.'

'Save your life! Nonsense, your lordship.'

‘But you can. I am totally ruined, you are my principal creditor, all my property has passed into your hands ; make me a liberal allowance, and trust to my luck to marry an heiress.’

‘No, my lord,’ replied Hawkes, with a decisive shake of the head, ‘I shall do no such thing. I have lost all confidence in you.’

‘Why? Because I am poor?’ asked the earl, with a tinge of bitterness in his tone.

‘You are a backer of horses, and a man who has got into that habit is lost. Make a book, bet against them if you like, but don’t back them. You have gone to the end of your tether with me, my lord. I have lent you money, I take the property you mortgaged to me, and there is an end of our connection. I may be a few hundreds the richer, but I have had the worry.’

‘A few thousands, you mean,’ cried Sark. ‘But no matter, I have made an effort to pay my debts and I have succeeded. I shall not be posted as a defaulter ; my honour is safe, that is the great thing. You, Hawkes, will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have ruined another nobleman, who was foolish enough to place himself in your hands.’

‘Now, how unjust that is, your lordship,’ cried Mr. Hawkes, with an injured air. ‘Have I ever refused to lend you money?’

‘Certainly not, when I brought security. You would not refuse now if I could hypothecate something with you as a guarantee of the loan. You talk to me about the folly of backing horses. Did you ever say a word about such a thing to me before? Never! Saddlegirth lost the Derby by some infernal chicanery, which perhaps you and your gang can explain. You will not allow a horse to run

on its merits. If it does not suit your book for the best animal of the day to win, you take effectual measures to prevent him.'

'I must beg, my lord, that you will not become abusive,' said Hawkes, with a bland smile.

'Abusive! I have a right to say what I like to you Hawkes.'

'Not here, in my own house.'

'Here, there, or anywhere. I don't know why I don't horsewhip you.'

'Because you have lost your money, and exemplified the fool's progress over again, and because I won't lend you any more money to fool away. A pretty story!' said Mr. Hawkes, growing hot in his turn.

The Earl of Sark sat down and looked the picture of despair and grief. He was haggard and wan.

'I deserve it all,' he muttered.

Hawkes walked up and down restlessly.

At last he stopped opposite the earl and exclaimed—

'You will excuse me, your lordship, when I tell you that I am very much occupied, and that I cannot spare you any more time unless you have some business to transact with me.'

'You have ruined me, and refuse to save me when you could do so if you liked. It was with you that I made my first bet. It was you who asked me if I wanted any money when I had sufficient for all my proper wants. You tempted me with your gold, and induced me to embark on the short career I have enjoyed. Let me see, who was the last of your victims who committed self-murder?'

'Don't talk like that, my lord,' exclaimed Hawkes, eyeing him narrowly.

'Don't be alarmed. I shall do nothing vulgar or com-

mon-place. My exit from this vale of tears will be highly original, I promise you. But I'll waste no more of your valuable time. Good morning.'

Hawkes held the door open for him to pass, and bowed low as he quitted the house. He attributed the young nobleman's remark to agitation and disappointment at not meeting with the assistance he required. He did not care whether the Earl of Sark was offended at his outspoken bluntness or not. Having made all he could out of him he was perfectly content to let him drift to his fate, whatever that might be.

The Marquis of Rackington was just commencing the career which the young Earl of Sark had just expressed his determination to finish so ingloriously. Hawkes was gradually immeshing him. He owed him between seventy and eighty thousand already, and he was in his power. It would be his business in future to tighten the coil, until he had reduced him to the mournful condition in which Sark was.

If Sark committed suicide, Reginald Hawkes could find nothing remarkable in the circumstance. He would only be the fifth who laid their deaths at his door. Four men, well known in London society, had killed themselves rather than face the horrors of poverty, after finding all their property in Hawkes' hands, and themselves unable to obtain a penny from the man who held their ancestral estates.

What Hawkes said was this—

'I am a money-lender and financial agent. I lend my money at the highest possible rate. I contrive to make a bargain with my clients which shall be favourable to me rather than to them. Is it not the way of the world? Who can blame me?'

At present we must occupy ourselves with the unfortunate Earl of Sark.

On leaving Bruton Street, he walked down Bond Street to Piccadilly, where he met Dr. Garner, with whom he was slightly acquainted, as well as most men about town.

‘Ah! dear boy,’ said Dr. Garner, with one of his most pleasant smiles, ‘where are you going?’

‘To commit suicide,’ answered the earl calmly.

‘That is right,’ said the doctor; ‘perfectly right and quite in accordance with your insular customs. I do not identify myself with you though I am an Englishman, because I have been so much abroad, but I quite approve of suicide if you feel inclined to indulge in the luxury. It is a luxury you know, because you can’t do it twice. But come, let us have a bottle of wine somewhere and talk the matter over. Perhaps I may be able to be of service to you in some way.’

‘With pleasure,’ rejoined the Earl of Sark, as he slipped his arm into that of Dr. Garner, and they walked down the street together.

CHAPTER IX.

‘AN ORIGINAL SUICIDE.’

IN a street running out of St. James’s Street was a club, to which the Earl of Sark belonged.

‘Let us go in here,’ he said, indicating the club with a gesture of his hand.

‘With all the delight in the world,’ answered Dr. Garner. ‘I am devoted to you to-day and to-morrow, and the day after, or the whole week if you like.’

‘You are too good,’ said the earl smiling.

They entered the club and went through to the smoking-room, when Sark ordered some wine, Dr. Garner expressing his predilection to still in preference to sparkling; he also refused a cigar, and smoked a pipe.

‘I suppose that a woman is the cause of your unhappiness,’ said Dr. Garner.

‘Not at all. I have lost all I have over the Derby.’

‘Ah! you backed Saddlegirth.’

‘I did, and the man who holds my property and has made thousands out of me, will not advance another penny. I mean——’

‘Reginald Hawkes,’ supplied Dr. Garner.

‘Precisely. I am glad you know the scoundrel, because you can sympathise with me.’

‘Let me see,’ observed the doctor, counting on his fingers, ‘you will be the fifth.’

‘What?’

‘He has killed.’

‘Yes, yes,’ cried the earl eagerly. ‘There were four. I have heard men at the clubs speak about them.’

‘Do you know their names?’

‘I do not.’

‘Shall I tell you?’

‘If you please. I shall be very glad to hear them. The mode in which they died is already familiar to me.’

‘The first was Sir Michael O’Donnel, an Irishman.’

‘*Cela va*,’ cried the earl.

Dr. Garner bowed.

‘The next was Captain Hurst Paget; the third Mr. Sandford Sartoris, and the fourth John Simpkin, the son of the city banker.’

‘You are right,’ said Sark, ‘and this was how they disposed of themselves. Sir Michael O’Donnel hung himself in Hyde Park; Paget threw himself over Waterloo Bridge, Sartoris cut his throat at Paris, and Simpkin, who had more refinement and classical knowledge than the rest, opened his veins in a warm bath in imitation of Seneca.’

The earl sighed deeply.

‘It is easy enough to kill oneself,’ he resumed. ‘But I should not like that brute Hawkes, and my friends generally, to say that I have no imagination. That would distress me extremely.’

‘How, no imagination?’ said Dr. Garner.

‘Well, you see, I can’t hang myself, drown myself, cut my throat, or open my veins in a bath, unless I travel in the beaten track.’

‘That is true.’

The earl sighed again.

‘You are fully resolved to put on wings?’ asked the doctor

‘Eh!’ ejaculated the earl.

‘That is to say, you sigh for the angelic state?’

‘Oh! most certainly.’

‘When do you think of killing yourself?’

‘As soon as possible. I have no money, nothing is left me to live for, but I want a new mode of suicide. I have acted independently and with originality all my life, short as it has been, and I cannot bear the idea of being commonplace in this last act of the drama.’

‘Very well,’ said Dr. Garner, ‘rely upon me. I will furnish you with what you desire.’

The earl uttered a cry of joy.

‘My dear, good fellow,’ said he, ‘give me your hand and assure me you are not joking.’

‘I! not the least in the world.’

They shook hands and the Earl of Sark, with delight expressed upon every lineament of his countenance, asked him what his advice was.

Emptying his glass, which he immediately refilled with very fine sillery, the doctor exclaimed—‘Buy a butt of sherry to imitate the example of the Duke of Clarence.’

‘Ah!’ said the earl, ‘that is all very well, but it is drowning, nevertheless, whether death is caused by Thames water or sherry.’

‘That is true. I forgot that? Try poisoning.’

‘It is so painful.’

‘No. The mode I should recommend to you is anything but painful,’ repeated the doctor; ‘you have heard of absinthe.’

‘Yes? The Swiss drink it.’

‘I don’t know about that; they make it.’

‘Well?’

‘Drink one bottle of that and your quietus will be arranged. The absinthe will poison you.’

‘Excellent!’ exclaimed the earl, wringing the doctor’s hand; ‘that will do, you are my friend. I will ring the bell and send one of the waiters for some absinthe. When shall I take it—at once?’

‘No, a thing of this sort must be done properly. One never drinks absinthe after dinner, always before. It is evening and we have both dined.’

‘You are right,’ said the Earl of Sark.

He and the doctor smoked and chatted a little longer. When they left the club they walked to the hotel at which the duke was stopping; on their way they bought a bottle of absinthe, which Sark took with him into his bed-room.

‘Come and see me to-morrow morning before eight. I should like to say good-bye to you,’ exclaimed the latter.

‘Willingly,’ replied Dr. Garner.

They shook hands and the earl, who was in excellent spirits, smoked a cigar, drank some brandy-and-water, and went to bed.

In the morning Dr. Garner, who was a remarkable man, without heart or feeling, and who took an interest in this strange adventure from its singularity, called at the hotel, and was ushered into the earl’s room.

He was awake, but sad.

‘Have you changed your mind?’

That was the first question Dr. Garner asked him.

‘Oh dear, no!’ replied the earl.

‘What, then, is the matter?’

‘I shall die hungry, and that’s against my principles.’

Dr. Garner laughed.

‘I am sufficiently English,’ he said, ‘to admit that as a valid excuse.’

‘You are.’

‘Decidedly—and I will propose something else.’

'You are really my friend,' the Earl of Sark cried, shaking him by the hand as he sprang out of bed, and almost immediately seized the bottle of absinthe and broke it against the wall.

'I have been thinking of a plan which must strike every one by its originality,' answered Dr. Garner. 'Have you been abroad?'

'Yes.'

'At Schaffhausen?'

'I know the spot well. The Devil's Hole is one of the show places, is it not?'

'That's the place I wish to speak to you about. It's a mysterious abyss; no one has ever been able to find the bottom of it. A cataract rolling down from the mountain side plunges into this hole. A dull and horrible noise is for ever rising from it, and when you drop a stone into its depths, listen as attentively as one will, no sound of its fall is audible. Now, my idea is that you should take a header into that hole.'

'How long will it take me to get to Schaffhausen?'

demanded the earl.

'A few days.'

'If I only had a companion.'

'I will go with you,' answered the doctor. 'It has long been my wish to indulge in a fresh excitement. To see a nobleman like yourself, tired of life at six-and-twenty, throw himself into this Devil's Gulf will be well worth the journey.'

The Earl of Sark again shook Dr. Garner by the hand, this time with tears in his eyes.

Their preparations for the journey were soon made, and they started together for the Continent. On arriving at Schaffhausen they put up at Weber's. It was evening

when our travellers arrived, after a most agreeable journey, and the earl declared he wished it was morning that he might make acquaintance with the Devil's Gulf.

Dr. Garner said that he never, in the whole course of his life, met with a man in such a hurry to die.

There is a magnificent fall of the Rhine at Schaffhausen, and the hotel at which they stopped overlooked the river. In the garden of the hotel was a stupid fountain with one jet, which seemed a mockery of nature.

'I have one favour to ask of you,' said the earl, looking at the jet of water.

'And that is——'

'Draw up a paragraph, doctor, about the absurdity of this German, who has put up this fountain in such a place, and have his folly exposed in all the principal papers of Europe.'

The doctor promised faithfully that this should be done. In the morning the earl proposed a breakfast by the side of the abyss, and a waiter was told to bring a basket of good things to the strange place which the Earl of Sark had selected for his tomb.

The gulf of which we speak opens in the midst of a mass of rocks and brushwood, and is of narrow dimensions.

When they arrived there, the earl amused himself in a playful manner, by throwing stones down the gulf and putting his hand to his ear to endeavour to discern the sound of their touching the bottom.

He could hear nothing, and with a smile of pleasure he exclaimed—

'It is clear that if I once go head first down there, I shall never come back again.'

The waiter had not the slightest suspicion of the terrible tragedy that was about to be enacted.

He spread a cloth upon a flat table sort of rock, and placed on it a partridge-pie, a smoked ham, *des truites du Rhin a l'huile*, and half-a-dozen bottles of champagne, without omitting coffee and liqueurs.

Dr. Garner, in a low voice, said to the earl—

‘We will keep the waiter.’

‘Why?’ demanded Sark.

‘It is as well to have two witnesses of the sort of thing you are going to do; your decease will be irregular without two witnesses.’

‘Pardon me; I forgot that,’ said Sark. ‘You might be accused of my death.’

‘Or of being accessory to it. I do not quite understand the beastly laws of this country. At all events it might be unpleasant. We went out to breakfast together; I come home alone; do you see, the inference is easy.’

‘Quite so; let the man stay.’

The earl ate a most hearty breakfast, and drank more than his share of the champagne; after that he drank some coffee and brandy.

The waiter did not understand a word of what was said because he was totally ignorant of the English language. Both men were laughing and talking. The earl was full of anecdote and never appeared to more advantage in his best days.

When he had satisfied his hunger, and chatted to his satisfaction, he shook Dr. Garner for the last time by the hand.

The doctor saw him walk towards the Devil’s Gulf, and actuated by a feeling of curiosity followed him.

When the Earl of Sark had gained the edge of the abyss he halted, and retraced a few steps.

‘Doctor,’ he said, ‘do you believe in——’

He paused, and pointed to the ground with his finger, as if to indicate the infernal regions.

‘No,’ answered the doctor shortly.

‘Nor I,’ replied the earl.

A moment afterwards he sprang forward and disappeared down the abyss.

The doctor stood by the side of the gulf, but heard nothing. He had vanished for ever.

Such was the romantic and melancholy end of the fifth victim of Reginald Hawkes.

A paragraph appeared in the continental journals about the ‘Eccentric Suicide of an English nobleman.’

It was noticed in England. People wondered, and then the affair was forgotten

CHAPTER X.

‘LOGWOOD’S CHESTER CUP.’

TIME flew, and the Marquis of Rackington continued his career of extravagance and folly. Marriette, his wife, did not lead a happy life; her husband was not much with her, and sad accounts of the way in which he spent his time reached her. She was unable to forget the handsome Thomas Oatley, and people said she flirted with him more than she was justified in doing when they met in Paris. Her mother scolded her, but she replied that the marquis was in London doing as he liked, and that she should die of *ennui* if she had no one to speak to.

Rumours reached the Marquis of Rackington that his wife was acting imprudently, and he telegraphed to her to come back to London, which she did; yet it was a fact that wherever the marchioness went without her husband, there as sure as fate would be Mr. Oatley.

The marquis got more deeply involved every month; his prodigality knew no bounds. He did not lose very heavily on the turf during the autumn which succeeded Saddle-girth’s loss of the Derby. The way in which he got rid of money was through riotous living, and encouraging friends, who made him contribute largely to their support and pay for the privilege of their society.

Mr. Hawkes one day went down to Halstead at the special request of the marquis, to see if he could not check the extravagance of the house steward and the servants generally.

He asked for a list of the plate.

The butler stared at him. They had never had such a thing in his experience. Hawkes asked what they were in the habit of doing when anything was lost. Things were often—very often lost, was the reply. But they sent up to the jewellers and silversmiths in town, and had the missing article supplied in a week.

After this information Hawkes in despair gave up the attempt to reform the household at Halstead. It was an Augean stable, requiring the skill of a Hercules to cleanse.

Sir Sutton Courtney, from his long experience of the turf, was an excellent judge of a race-horse, and he advised the marquis to purchase one entered for the Chester cup. Its name was Logwood. Those were the days of enormous prices for race-horses. In the Rackington-Oatley era horses fetched a price they will never perhaps see again. Acting upon Sir Sutton's advice, the marquis gave six thousand guineas for Logwood, and neither Dale his trainer, or Reginald Hawkes found fault with the purchase.

It was their opinion that Logwood could win the Chester cup, though some of the 'Cognoscenti' as the sporting papers call the knowing ones, did not believe it.

However, when Turner Ellis, the great book-maker of the Southern division, and Spool the Northern leviathan, who always acted with Hawkes, began to back Logwood, he went up in the betting with astonishing rapidity, the Roodee being a course peculiarly adapted to the capabilities of a horse like Logwood.

The marquis was delighted when his trainer and commissioner told him that he had an excellent chance of winning the Chester cup; he wanted to win a big race, and he plunged terribly over the event. The odds he got were rather short, seven to one being the ruling price.

Rackington made up a party and went down to Chester. Sir Sutton Courtney, Ord Parker, and Captain Craven were with him as a matter of course. There were seventeen animals coloured on the card for the cup. The weather was dull and heavy, rain had fallen in the morning, but the excursionists and pleasure-seekers were not to be driven away from their promised enjoyment; still there was nothing to induce them to combine a ramble over the interesting portions of the ancient city of Chester, or a trip on the silvery Dee, with witnessing the race.

One of the principal charms of the city consists at this time of year in the many green nooks and corners and blooming little orchards at the foot of the city walls, which find their counterpart under the south-eastern part of the ramparts at Boulogne. The dreary weather took away from the beauty of this sight, which, as a harbinger of spring, is very pleasant.

The walls and embankment round one side of the ground, form, as it were, natural grand stands, from which the sport can be witnessed as in an amphitheatre. Of course these points of 'vantage are always early seized upon and they were crammed, in spite of the rain, while the stand and temporary structures were densely packed with an eager and expectant crowd.

On the balcony of the grand stand are always to be seen the members of the most conspicuous of the county families, and it was on this occasion graced by the presence of many elegantly-attired ladies.

A tremendous muster of professionals was to be noticed in the saddling enclosure.

The Marchioness of Rackington, hearing that her husband's horse Logwood was sure to win the cup, begged him to take her to Chester. He complied with her wish, and

she added very much to the notice which his party attracted, as her sister, almost as beautiful a girl as herself, and her mother accompanied her.

The Marchioness of Rackington and her sister were very elegantly attired. The latter wore a costume of grey silk, the skirt being formed from the knee with a flounce put on in large flat plaits, all placed the same way, the bodice and over-skirt trimmed with grey fringe, and *ruches* of rose-coloured silk ; a bonnet of fine white straw, trimmed with a profusion of moss-rose buds.

The dress of the marchioness was much more splendid in appearance. The petticoat was of a most lovely coral-colour silk, with four flounces about three inches wide, a dress of rich black silk, trimmed with magnificent Chantilly lace, a lappet of the same on the head, adorned with a small ostrich feather, coral colour. To complete this costume she wore three strings of large coral beads, worth a king's ransom, round her neck, and had a black parasol covered with lace to match that on her dress, and a carved coral handle.

She gave the marquis no occasion to blush for her taste in dress. Every eye was fixed upon her, and the expressions of admiration which fell from those who acknowledged and felt the power of her beauty were universal.

When the hour for the race for the cup approached, only a dozen runners were telegraphed.

This was a small field, one of the smallest indeed during the last twenty years, if we except Asteroid's year.

Dale the trainer and Hawkes had arrived at Chester two days before with the horse, which was in excellent condition, and doing as well as his friends could wish ; still he had numerous opponents, and the public did not rush on with the alacrity they sometimes evince in support of a favourite horse.

The principal opponents Logwood had to encounter were Captain Kidd, Sackington, Victoria Regina, Little Woman, Fairweather, and Polypus. Captain Kidd and Fairweather were entrusted with large sums of money on the morning of the race. Messrs. Turner, Ellis, and Spool, created a little consternation in the market by championing Logwood, and steadily slaughtering Captain Kidd and Fairweather.

At the subscription room of the Grosvenor Hotel, the great book-makers had placidly bet against the field, and stood Logwood, refusing to write his name any more in a hostile sense.

Sir Sutton Courtnay, as well as the whole of the friends of the marquis, raved about Logwood, and had put their last shilling on him.

He met Hawkes on the course after the first race, and stopping him said, 'Any startling alteration in the price current?'

'The 'Wood is first favourite at three to one, and you won't get that directly,' answered Hawkes.

'By Jove! that's good news. I got on at a long price. Shall I hedge?'

'Don't lay off a halfpenny piece, sir,' answered Hawkes, emphatically.

'Very well. But I like to make things safe.'

'You are safe. You don't suppose,' Hawkes said, sinking his voice to a whisper, 'that Spool, and Turner, and I would go in a raker as we have done if we were not satisfied that it is all right?'

'Oh!' ejaculated Sir Sutton Courtnay.

Presently he added, 'What about Captain Kidd? He made a flicker in the market last night at the Grosvenor.'

'Stumped up. He has been seen to,' answered Mr.

Hawkes in the same low mysterious tone. 'I tell you that this race is a moral for the 'Wood. Put all you have on. Go and pawn your shirt and borrow all you can. I know what the horse can do, I've watched him since he was a colt. If he was burnt I could swear to his ashes. There is nothing else in the race. It will be a walk over. I tell you it's a settled thing.'

The voices of the book-makers sounded loudly on the air, and 'The field a poney—the field a poney' rose shrilly and was borne towards Sir Sutton, who went into the ring and risked a few more hundreds on the new flyer.

At last the flag fell.

Despatched to a good start at the first attempt, the lot for a few yards maintained a straight line, after this Captain Kidd was the first to take a slight lead, closely followed by Sackington and Victoria Regina, but when they had fairly settled down, Sackington forced the pace and held the lead as they passed the stand, Little Woman, Fairweather Sackington and Polypus attending closely in a cluster, and these positions were maintained with little alteration round the workhouse turn and along the railway side. Upon reaching the bridge Fairweather took third place, Victoria Regina still having a clear lead with Polypus, Sackington and Little Woman following in close attendance.

In the next quarter of a mile Polypus went up to Victoria Regina, and racing alongside of her eventually took a clear lead, which was maintained passing the stand a second time, when he was again headed by Regina, while simultaneously Little Woman improved her position. Going along the railway side Fairweather, who till this point had always been conspicuous amongst the leaders, was beaten, and Little Woman taking advantage of his retirement occupied his place; at the same moment Polypus was rapidly com-

pounding, and as he dropped back he came in collision with Little Woman, carrying the latter on to the rails. The horse was cut on the shoulder and the jockey shaken. Going along the Dee-side Polypus was beaten, and Logwood, having gradually drawn to the fore, took up the running; at the same time Victoria Regina held out signals of distress, while the immediate attendants on the leader were Captain Kidd, Little Woman, and Sackington. On making the turn into the straight Logwood increased his lead, and drawing away won in the commonest of canters by four lengths.

It would be difficult to describe the scene of enthusiasm awakened by Logwood's magnificent performance, and Little Babb, the jockey, was fairly mobbed by his admirers as he went to weigh.

The marquis was frantic with delight.

Leaning over the stand he exclaimed to Spool, who was below, "Now what do you think of my stable? What will you lay against the Peer and Lady Jane coupled, for the Derby?"

'Twenty thousand to five, my lord,' answered the leviathan.

'I take you,' answered the marquis.

The bet was entered, and the great book-maker passed on.

Presently he met Reginald Hawkes.

'I have been following up your tip,' he exclaimed. 'Just now I laid twenty to five in thousands against the Peer and Lady Jane coupled.'

'You did perfectly right,' answered Mr. Hawkes. 'Lady Jane will come in with the ruck and the Peer shall never see the post at all. We swim in the same boat. Trust to me. What have you landed over this event?'

'Never mind, I don't grumble,' answered Spool.

The success of the marquis's stable caused his nominations for the Derby to be favourably inquired for.

Excellent reports respecting Lady Jane were everywhere circulated, and she soon stood at the head of the betting.

CHAPTER XI.

‘THE FLY FLUTTERS.

THE Halstead stable now took a prominent place in turf circles, and the sporting papers all had correspondents stationed there, who sent up their weekly letters.

The following is a specimen of the sort of information the *Sporting Clipper*, a penny bi-weekly journal, favoured its numerous subscribers with.

‘Sir,

‘On Saturday the following horses were out on the heath at Halstead. The Peer, Lady Jane and Logwood. The latter was sent to lead Lady Jane a steady canter of a mie and a quarter. Some walking exercise followed, and then Logwood led the Lady a second canter of a mile and a half. The Peer joined in the last half-mile, improving the pace all pulled up sound and well. On Sunday a number of horses were out. Dukedom has not been out for some time, he having on a former occasion strained himself; he was sent into the hollow and only did walking exercise, and soon returned to the stables; the others repeated their previous canters. Logwood led Lady Jane at a rare pace of a mile and three-quarters, both going freely and within themselves. After that Fearless went to work at his best pace for the Earl over a mile, when he returned dead-beaten; and Logwood took up the running at a clipping pace for another mile, when he also appeared to have had quite enough of the crack, who never went

in better form. I get fonder of the Peer the more I see of him, and should he go on all right until the Derby he will take a great amount of beating. Tuesday—we have had twelve hours' steady rain, and it still continues, in consequence no horses have left the stables up to the time of my sending this report.

‘Yours, etc.—’

‘SIR,

‘On Saturday most of our lot were busy at work. Dale sent out Lady Jane and the Peer, which, after two canters, went a nice gallop of one mile and a mile. Lady Jane will take her own part in the Derby; a finer mare I never saw. The Peer did a half speed gallop of one mile and a half, but to my thinking pulled up very groggy. I may have been mistaken, but I fancy there is a screw loose somewhere, or it may have been the tactics of the stable to get on at a longer price. Trainers are so artful now that one can't always get at their motives.

‘Yours, etc.—’

The marquis was not in good health, but he was much interested in his horses, and pleased to think the public accorded them such generous support.

His physician recommended him change of air, so he, acting upon Mr. Hawkes' advice, bought a yacht, and sailed for the Mediterranean, taking Ord Parker and Captain Craven with him, Sir Sutton Courtney promising to write often and keep him *au courant* with the news of London.

When the marquis was out of the way, Hawkes proceeded to do what he liked with the horses at Halstead.

He caused injurious reports to be circulated respecting them, but the public were not to be alarmed by these

damaging rumours. Lady Jane continued at the head of quotations, and the Peer was freely backed for place.

A few weeks before the great race was run, a report was rife that the Per was to be scratched. Then people said that Lady Jane would not run.

Sir Sutton Courtney was puzzled to make out the intentions of Hawkes. He was afraid that the reputation of his friend would suffer, and this was very dear to him, as he did not like his young friend to be dragged through the dirt by what he considered the machinations of Hawkes; accordingly he wrote to Rackington the following letter—

‘MY DEAR RACKINGTON,

‘You may, perhaps, consider it impertinent on my part to meddle in your affairs, but you particularly requested me to send you all the news I could collect. Sinister rumours respecting the good faith your stable means to keep with the public are being set about. It is said that Lady Jane will not run, and people are backing her already with the proviso of a start. The Peer it is to be your intention to scratch. A commission was, I know, sent out by Hawkes to bet against both the horse and the mare, and Spool as well as Turner have for months evinced the most determined hostility against your nominations. It is not right that all this should go on in your absence. The crowd say you are a tool in Hawkes’ hands, and that he has sent you out of the way on purpose. Can you not hasten your return, and come at once?’

Here the letter broke off.

‘5.30.’ It resumed :—‘I took a run up to the corner to see if I could hear anything fresh, and have just time to write a few more lines before post time. I have the most alarming intelligence for you. The pen was put through

the Peer's name at 4 o'clock to-day, and no reason whatever is assigned. Consternation is general. Those who have backed Lady Jane on the strength of your reputation are trembling in their shoes. For God's come back at once. I send this to Gib., where you said you would be about this time.

‘I am, dear Rackington,

‘Yours very sincerely,

‘SUTTON COURTNAY.’

The marquis had been spending a week with the officers at Gibraltar when he received this letter. He at once showed it to Captain Craven and Ord Parker, who, both of them, knew very well that he had no complicity in Hawkes's designs, whatever they were. He had backed Lady Jane, declaring that he would win with her, if possible. Indeed, if this horse disappointed his expectations, he would be a heavy loser.

Leaving Ord Parker in charge of the yacht, he at once proceeded to return home, by way of Marseilles, with Captain Craven.

On reaching London, Rackington did not stay to change his travelling clothes.

He went promptly to Mr. Hawkes, who did not expect him so soon.

‘Hawkes,’ he exclaimed, refusing his proffered hand, ‘what is the meaning of this?’

‘Of what!’ demanded Mr. Hawkes, pretending ignorance.

‘You have scratched the Peer, I am told.’

‘Yes replied Hawkes, quietly.

‘How dare you do so, sir, without asking my permission, and consulting me. I try to be calm, but d—— it, sir, I can't keep my temper!’

‘If your lordship will have the goodness to listen to my explanation——’

‘Well,’ ejaculated Rackington.

He paced the room restlessly.

‘I saw that the Peer could not win. Our only chance was with Lady Jane, and to prevent the public from losing their money, I scratched the horse.’

‘But, devil take it, Mr. Hawkes, couldn’t you have given them a run for their money?’ cried the marquis, with impetuosity.

Mr. Hawkes smiled.

‘You should trust to my experience, my lord,’ he said; ‘your interests are safe in my hands.’

‘I don’t think so, and I shall at once cease to hold any further connection with you,’ answered Rackington, indignantly. ‘I will no longer dirty my hands with you, sir.’

‘Your lordship will act as you please,’ rejoined Mr. Hawkes, who was remarkable for never losing his temper.

‘From this moment I take all my affairs out of your hands.’

‘Your lordship will do as you think fit,’ said Mr. Hawkes, with a bow.

‘I shall make this public.’

‘As soon as your lordship likes, but——’

Mr. Hawkes paused, and looked earnestly at him.

‘There is a little bill to be settled first,’ he continued.

‘Oh, I know I owe you money; you need not think to threaten me with that,’ said the marquis.

‘Perhaps you don’t know the amount, my lord?’

‘No, I have not troubled myself with money matters; you have done pretty nearly as you like with me.’

‘You owe me with principal and interest, which I admit

has been over a hundred per cent., more than two hundred thousand pounds !' exclaimed Mr. Hawkes.

'The deuce I do !' said the marquis, who was completely staggered by this immense sum total.'

'It is as I have the honour to represent to you.'

'The honour is a doubtful one.'

'If I am paid this sum, I shall be glad to give up the management of your lordship's affairs; if not, I shall continue to act as I think best for your interests.'

'Do you know, Hawkes, that you are behaving like a low scoundrel ?' said the marquis.

'Very possibly,' returned Hawkes with composure. 'I am not prepared to contradict you.'

'There is one consolation. Lady Jane can and shall win the Derby. The public shall not be deceived there.'

Some further conversation took place, and the marquis became mollified after a time. He thought he had judged Hawkes too harshly. A revulsion of feeling occurred which Hawkes took advantage of, and eventually the marquis went away, having shaken hands with him and made a sort of half-apology for having spoken as he had to him.

By a strange, and it seems to us singularly unfair, rule of the turf, a man who bets upon a horse loses his money if the horse is scratched. The public trust to the honour of the owners of race-horses, which recent events have proved to be wrong, because the most honourable owner is powerless when in the hands of unscrupulous men. It would be fairer by far, if the bet were cancelled and wiped out altogether if a horse does not run.

Both Dale and Hawkes had put large hostile commissions in the market respecting the Peer.

Their gains were very large when the horse was struck out of all his engagements until the St. Leger, for which

they backed him heavily at long odds, feeling sure he could win it if they liked.

Lady Jane continued so well that the touts were in ecstasies about her. It was a ticklish time for mares they said, but, bar accidents, her ladyship must win. It was the greatest certainty out.

Dale came up to see Hawkes about the mare. She was so alarmingly well that he did not know what to do about the money he had privately laid against her.

'Well, Dale,' exclaimed Mr. Hawkes, as the trainer entered, 'glad to see you. How's the mare?'

'First-rate, sir—A 1. She's a steam engine, as Mr. Hodgman would say of his *Buccaneer*,' answered the trainer.

'That's right,' replied Hawkes.

To him Hawkes was an enigma, a sphynx.

'Are the public to have a run for their money, sir?' he asked.

'Decidedly, Dale—oh, yes, most certainly.

'But——'

'It would not do to scratch the favourite—oh dear, no!' interrupted Mr. Hawkes; 'we must act very differently to that. Lady Jane must run.'

'If she runs she wins, that's flat,' said the trainer lugubriously.

'No, she doesn't' replied Hawkes.

'There's nothing in the race that can beat her, sir, don't make any error,' exclaimed Dale, almost pleadingly. 'I haven't been amongst blood horses all these years without knowing something about them. If you have laid off your money and made your book right you might have told me. It will be a heavy loss, it will indeed.'

The great financial agent smiled, as if he would say,

‘You do not know the great ideas which are revolving in my mighty brain.’

‘Lady Jane shall run, Dale,’ he said, ‘but she shall go queer on the morning of the race, and come in with the ruck. The public will drop their coins, and say she was an over-rated horse, or put it down to her sex. There will be a crowd of reasons why she lost the race, but we shall know the true one, and we alone.’

Dale nodded his head.

He saw now what was intended.

‘I don’t like it,’ he said.

‘You are not asked for any opinion, all you have to do is to follow your instructions,’ replied Hawkes, coldly.

‘Suppose it comes out.’

‘Well?’

‘I am ruined.’

‘And I too. For my own sake I am not likely to publish your rascality to the world, and say Dale poisoned Lady Jane, because you would retort, and say you received your orders from me. If a horse is ever so good, my friend, you cannot make sure of his winning a race like the Derby. A rank outsider or a dark horse may crop up and win. There is no certainty of winning, but, by heaven, Dale, there is a certainty of losing! Do you see that?’

‘Yes,’ replied Dale, shortly.

‘It shall be the latter with this horse, Lady Jane.’

‘I am sorry for the marquis, it will break his heart and empty his pockets too, unless——’

‘What?’ demanded Hawkes, as the trainer hesitated.

‘Unless his lordship stands in with you.’

‘Not a halfpenny. He is a nobleman, and what the world calls a gentleman,’ said Hawkes, with a bitter sneer.

‘I am not; the world calls me a thief—at least, that part of

the world which can do without me—the other half being in my debt, or wanting me, thinks I am a thief, but does not dare to say so openly. I mean to act up to the character the world chooses to give me.’

Will it be to your advantage, sir, for the marquis to lose?’ asked Dale.

‘Of course it will.’

‘How? I don’t see.’

‘Listen to me. As long as he has got an acre to mortgage, just so long will I lend him money to pay his debts, charging him a hundred per cent. for the accommodation. Now do you see?’

‘Well, sir, I suppose you know,’ said Dale, in a rather melancholy tone. ‘I wish it could be done without hurting the horse, or without hurting the marquis, but if it can’t, it can’t, can it?’

Hawkes laughed at his quaint way of expressing himself.

‘You are a good fellow, Dale; do what you’re told and keep your own counsel. I will see that you don’t suffer. You must look at our connection in this light—I am the man of plan and action, I have the head—I plot, you execute.’

Dale was only another fly in the spider’s web. His position was very little better than that of the marquis.

Hawkes had taken care to lend him money. If he had liked, the great ‘financial agent’ could have ruined him in four-and-twenty hours.

Poor flies!

What could they do but flutter?

CHAPTER XII.

‘A STRANGE FREAK OF THE OWNER.’

TURNING up a little court running out of Fleet Street is the office door of the *Sporting Clipper*. Passing this, and going through a square, under an archway and into a street, is a tavern. This tavern is known as the ‘Widow’s.’ Here the gentlemen connected with the *Sporting Clipper* spend their leisure moments. They smoke here, they bet here, they drink and they dine here—when they have the money. Sometimes the gentlemen of the press have a lofty disdain for dining—they are too much pressed with business—they have no appetite—business men should not think of such a material matter as dining, which by no stretch of the imagination can be called an intellectual amusement. Here the staff of the *Clipper* impart mysterious information respecting the horses entered in different races, or give tips to their intimate acquaintance as to the respective merits of men engaged in running matches, or cricketing teams.

The week before the Derby is a period of great excitement among the members of the sporting press, and those of the sporting world generally.

The *Sporting Clipper* had been consistent in the support it awarded to Lady Jane. It had said all along that Lady Jane would win, and the Peer run into a place.

A week before the Derby a few of the gentlemen on the *Clipper* were to be seen in the private bar of the ‘Widow’s.’

They were Mr. Flickering Wigg, cricket, a little man, very emphatic in his manners and impatient of contradiction, Mr. Rudder, boating, Mr. Straker, racing reporter, and Mr. Fleet, running and athletic sports. The special racing commissioner, of whom the *Sporting Clipper* was so proud, and whose name was in print Eagle-eye, but who in private life was known as Juggings, did not affect taverns where the small fry congregated. He had his own chambers in the Strand, and kept a bottle of dry sherry and some cigars in a cupboard for the benefit of his friends. He was too shrewd to poison himself with indifferent mixtures, given him by goodness knows who, for the sake of a tip. Eagle-eye once told an intimate friend that he rarely, if ever, gave the same horse to two men.

‘I select all the likely horses in the race,’ he exclaimed, ‘and when people I know come to me, and ask me what is going to win, I say one name to one man and another to another. Those who lose abuse me; those who win swear by and make me little presents as tokens of gratitude.’

‘Who’s going to pay for this round?’ asked Mr. Fleet, a stout, red-faced-looking man, who had once been a professional.

‘We will toss for it,’ exclaimed Mr. Flickering Wigg.

‘All I know is, if I lose I haven’t any money to pay for it,’ said Mr. Straker, with a gush of confidence.

‘Stick it up, then,’ replied Fleet, who was of a saturnine, not to say surly, disposition when not thawed and soothed by brandy.

Mr. Straker sighed.

A slate hung against the wall; it was covered with mystic figures, and it reproached him.

‘I have a new way of tossing. It is less common than

Tommy Dodd,' observed Mr Flickering Wigg. 'There are four of us. Very well. Here is my pocket handkerchief. I take the four corners, having previously tied a knot in one. I place the corners in my hand between my first finger and thumb. You draw one apiece in turn, and the man who gets the knot pays.'

'I'd rather not,' said Straker with a smile.

'You brute,' said Mr. Rudder, 'you tried to make a joke.'

When the question of payment was satisfactorily disposed of, the conversation turned upon the great race.

'Grimmer writes from Halstead that the mare was never doing better,' observed Straker.

'I shall put all I possess in the world on him,' said Mr. Flickering Wigg.

'Then he will not be backed heavily as far as you are concerned,' said Mr. Rudder.

'All I know is, I shall be obliged to temporarily quit the gay and festive scene,' exclaimed Mr. Wigg.

'That will be no great loss,' said Straker, *sotto voce*.

'Our governor,' remarked Mr. Fleet, 'told me that he had an interview with Dale the trainer, who is an old friend of his, and he told him that as far as he knew the mare was well enough, and that is good enough for me to stand her.'

This brief conversation is sufficient to show that even those who considered themselves well informed were lamentably ignorant of the real state of affairs.

The horses selected by the marquis to run were brought to town and taken to Epsom. On Sunday Lady Jane did a gentle canter over the downs, and the legion of touts were so well pleased, and made such glowing reports, that she was brought up to three to one, offered freely.

Dale made his head-quarters at Epsom and expected to

see Hawkes every day, but the discounter did not come down until Tuesday afternoon. Mr. Dale met him by appointment arranged by telegraph at the station.

There were several men lounging about apparently waiting for the train, but who in reality were watching the movements of the trainer, for the words and actions of the trainer of a valuable horse become of considerable importance on the eve of a momentous race.

Hawkes knew this very well, and said in a loud voice, 'Morning, Dale. How is the crack?'

'Never better, sir,' replied Dale, and they went away in the same fly to the stables.

Away went the touts to send a wire and flash the news to their employers, that there was no doubt that her ladyship was 'meant.'

As they went along Mr. Hawkes said to the trainer, 'Does any one sleep in the stable with the horse?'

'The jock has since he came here.'

'You had better do so to-night.'

'Me?'

'Yes.'

Mr. Dale looked astonished.

'What are you frightened at?' asked Hawkes with a laugh. 'Don't look scared, man. You may have a nocturnal visitor.'

'May have?'

'Yes, but he won't hurt you.'

'Do you mean to say you'll come and doctor the horse? Why—why can't you let me do it?' said Dale.

'Because I would not trust my own brother in a matter of this sort,' replied Hawkes. 'You are my particular friend, and I know you're square, but yet I won't trust you. There is too much hanging to it.'

Dale trembled violently.

‘Please yourself,’ he said.

When they reached the stables they had a look at the horse, spoke to the jockey, and went into a private apartment—a sort of saddle-room, where Dale had some wine.

‘Now for a pipe or a cigar, whichever you prefer, and a wet,’ said Hawkes.

‘Do you mind Babb coming in?’

‘Yes, we can’t talk before lads.’

Babb was the jockey who was to ride Lady Jane; a clever horseman. He was in the opinion of many too young to ride a horse cleverly. They said Logwood ran away with him on the Chester cup course. He certainly came in pulling double, making such an example as had not been seen since Flash in the Pan’s year. Babylon was the name the lad derived from his father, and they corrupted it into Babb.

‘Open some fiz—we can afford it,’ said Hawkes.

Dale, always obedient to orders, did so.

Taking up a copy of the *Sporting Clipper*, Hawkes ran his eye over its columns.

‘It’s a great lark,’ said the trainer, ‘to see what these writing fellows say about us.’

‘Yes. It’s rather amusing,’ answered Hawkes, offering his case to Dale, who refused a cigar, saying: ‘Clay for me.’ Presently he added, ‘Do you see that advertisement there about a Winning Modus?’

‘Yes.’

‘That’s put in by a man we employed at Halstead. You remember Grimmer?’

‘Perfectly well.’

‘He calls himself Parkinson, now. But read the advertisement,’ said Dale.

Mr. Hawkes ran his eye over the front page of the

Sporting Clipper and read the following remarkable composition :—

‘Mr. Parkinson’s Winning Modus.—In daily realising incomparably rich winnings with this Modus, another great and distinguished victory was very successfully achieved at all the late prominent meetings. Mr. Parkinson’s distinguished Winning Modus, for beauty, force, and power, has never yet failed in clearly realising treasures of precious weekly winnings and successes. For this reason this eminent and moneyed success was the result with this Modus, especially at the Newmarket Spring Meeting. For acquiring an ascendancy over any other capital—making Turf discovery, either secret or public, it is truly marvellous. In fact, this Winning Modus never deteriorates in its character, immense riches, or winnings, for it is strikingly and truthfully infallible and never failing. At any rate, it will win 18,000*l.* or 20,000*l.* for any investor ere the final close of the season. Do not think this anywise fiction, for it is strict verity. Mr. Parkinson takes this opportunity to respectfully thank his patronisers for their compliments, congratulations, and presents.

‘Mr. P subjoins the following testimonials :—

“SIR.—For distinction, honour, and fame, your marvellous Winning Modus is worthy of its renown, I am happy in asserting it has won me 4,220*l.* nett so quickly and readily this season. Accept the 200*l.* enclosed.—I am, &c.,

“ARTHUR WIGURTIŃ.”

“SIR,—Do me a favour in accepting the enclosed cheque for 50*l.* Through the instrumentality of your certainly very successful Winning Modus, I am, to my infinite pleasure, quickly becoming a certain and never-failing winning

of thousands, for already has its golden agency marvellously won me 3,400*l.*—I am, &c.,

“BERKELEY FRODSHAM.”

‘Mr. Parkinson’s Winning Modus foretold every important winner at Newmarket. At Epsom each winner will as certainly be foretold.

‘For this successful Winning Modus, and its infinite riches, forward a stamped directed envelope.

‘Of course it’s a do,’ said Mr. Dale, ‘and I wonder how it is the public are so easily gulled.’

‘Oh, they get something for their money. Mr. Parkinson, I suppose, sends them an infallible system by means of which they must win, just as a fellow used to advertise “how to make a thousand a year,” and sent you for a shilling his way of playing at the German gaming-houses. But it is a marvel how any one can be deceived by such a badly constructed, illiterate absurdity as that which I have just read.’

‘There is another of the same kind; I know the man who has that, and he gets a living out of it,’ observed Dale, pointing out an advertisement with his finger.

‘ENORMOUS ODDS—GREAT TREBLE EVENT—EPSOM DERBY, OAKS, AND ASCOT GRAND CUP.—Two horses have been expressly saved for the two first events, and one of the best judges on the turf tells me they are the greatest certainties he ever knew. As for the third event, it is quite at the mercy of the owner of a certain animal. I do not hesitate to say that there never was, and never will be, a better chance of pulling off a large stake at a trifling risk, for I can obtain the enormous odds of 1,840*l.* to 1*l.*, or

920*l.* to 10*s.* or 460*l.* to 5*s.*, or I will send the secret for fourteen stamps. Established twenty years.—Address, Wizard, Gerard Street, Soho, London.'

'All honour to the flat-catchers, that's all I can say ; we do it ourselves,' said Mr. Hawkes, who was in a moralizing vein. 'It's only a question of degree. I look out for flats, so do Messrs. Parkinson and Wizard. I do things on a larger scale than they, that's the only difference.'

There was a knock at the door of the little room.

Both men started.

Dale got up and looked through a little window which commanded a view of the outside.

Coming back on tip-toe to Hawkes, he said in a terrified whisper.

'It's the governor!

'The marquis?'

'Yes.'

'What of that?' said Hawkes. 'That makes no difference, let him in ; don't stand there like a —— fool, man.'

The trainer, however, did not move.

With an exclamation of disgust Hawkes got up and opened the door, exclaiming, 'Come in.'

Wrapped in a light overcoat, and smoking a cigar, the Marquis of Rackington entered the room.

Nodding to the trainer, he shook hands with Hawkes, saying—

'You did not expect me.'

'Not till to-morrow, my lord,' answered Hawkes.

'I thought not, that's why I came down,' said the marquis.

'May I ask what your lordship means?'

‘Oh, yes.’

‘Then I beg most respectfully to be informed whether your lordship meant anything insulting.’

‘I don’t feel disposed to answer you. Some things must be left to the imagination. It is better so,’ replied the marquis, carelessly throwing himself in a chair, and putting his feet on the fender.

Dale was looking out of the window.

He felt guilty, and he did not care about meeting the eyes of the employer and master whom he was about to betray so shamefully.

‘How’s the weather, Dale?’ asked the marquis.

‘Fine and dry, sir. The course will be excellent going to-morrow,’ replied the trainer.

‘That is good news. We must see that the horse keeps well.’

‘Dale is going to sleep in the stable himself to-night,’ exclaimed Hawkes, who had been biting his lips.

‘Very proper; but I will save him the trouble,’ answered Rackington.

‘You, my lord.’

‘Why not? It is a fancy of mine.’

‘But to sleep in a stable!’

‘Well—what of that?’

‘Oh, nothing much. If your lordship wishes it, of course I have nothing to say against it. Dale or I would do just as well, and save you the trouble.’

‘I have an idea, Hawkes, that some evil disposed scoundrel—that’s a good word, isn’t it?—may try to get at the mare.’

‘Not very likely,’ said Hawkes, with an attempt at a smile, which resulted in a miserable failure.

It was clear to Mr. Hawkes that the apprehensions of

the marquis were in some way aroused. How he could not conjecture.

After a pause of short duration, but which was anything but pleasant while it lasted, the marquis offered Hawkes a cigar.

‘No, my lord, I will neither smoke nor drink with you,’ answered Hawkes. ‘Your coming here seems to imply that you are suspicious of me. From this moment I throw up all supervision over your stable. I wash my hands of it. The horse would have been safe enough in my hands. Take the management yourself, and see what will happen.’

‘Is that a threat?’ demanded Rackington.

‘A threat!’

‘Yes. If it is I shall know how to deal with you.’

‘Really, my lord, this is most extraordinary language to hold to so old and good a friend as myself.’

‘Is it a threat?’ persisted the marquis.

‘God forbid!’ replied Hawkes, emphatically.

‘In what sense am I to interpret it, then?’

‘As a warning.’

‘Oh, that is another thing.’

There was another pause. Dale took no part in the conversation, though he listened attentively to all that was said.

Hawkes broke the silence again.

‘The horse is in the stable adjoining this little room, my lord,’ he said, ‘and is as scound as a roach, and fit, as they say, to run for a man’s life. It is for you to see that she remains so.’

‘I am fully aware of that, and I accept the responsibility,’ answered the marquis.

Mr. Hawkes rose to go.

‘I am going, my lord,’ he said, in a tone which seemed to imply that he wanted to be asked to stop.

‘Very well—go. I don’t want to stop you,’ answered Rackington, who had been drinking, and who could be very rude when he chose.

Mr. Hawkes put on his hat with a jerk, and walked out in a huff, saying ‘Good-day’ in a voice that was anything but melodious.

He strolled into the town of Epsom, and went into the hotel at which he stayed, muttering to himself—

‘That’s a strange freak of the owner.’

‘Very!’ exclaimed a voice at his elbow.

He turned round and beheld Dr. Garner.

CHAPTER XIII.

'THE NIGHT BEFORE THE DERBY.'

SHAKING hands with his friend, Hawkes expressed himself very glad to have met with him.

'But,' he added, 'how do you know to what I alluded?'

'Intuition, my dear fellow,' replied Dr. Garner.

'That is all rubbish.'

'No, it is not. I am a bit of a wizard; but the fact is, I came down in the train with Rackington, who told me he meant to watch the mare himself.'

'Oh! I see,' answered Hawkes.

'We will talk over the matter,' said the doctor, in his quiet way. 'I have ordered some dinner, let us eat that first. A hungry man is unmanageable; to be docile, he must, like a horse, first have a bit in his mouth.'

They went into a private room, and sat down to what the doctor called a 'quiet little feed,' which consisted of spring soup, salmon boiled, cutlets with olives, a duckling, peas, 'grass,' and a sweet omelette. Mr. Hawkes scarcely touched anything. He paid some attention to the 'fizzing moselle,' and that was all.

'A man can't eat,' he said, 'when his mind is at work.'

'I must get Rackington down here, and you must make him drunk,' said Garner, when he had eaten to his satisfaction.

'If you will do that I will give you——'

'That is understood. I shall make you my banker when I need assistance, not now,' interrupted Garner.

Hawkes had risen in his enthusiasm, and was standing up excitedly.

Suddenly the door opened, and to the astonishment of both men the marquis walked in.

‘Oh, here you are, Hawkes,’ he exclaimed, as he entered *sans ceremonie*. ‘I felt so doosed dull up there, and couldn’t get a word out of old Dale, that I thought I’d come down here, and have an hour with you, more especially as I thought you were huffed and had mistaken my meaning. I had to draw several cribs before I found you, though.’

Hawkes was delighted.

He shook the hand of the young marquis with every demonstration of affection.

‘This is kind of you. I knew you did not mean what you said,’ he exclaimed.

‘I am crotchety, you know.’

‘I have my enemies, and I suppose some kind friend had been giving me a lift to you.’

‘Well, I don’t know that I ought to say anything.’

‘Tell me his name,’ cried Hawkes.

‘No, no. It is not worth while. I wish I had come earlier. I could worry the wing of a chicken, and struggle with a bottle of fiz.’

Hawkes rang the bell.

The marquis was quickly provided with something to eat, and Dr. Garner did his utmost to be fascinating, and keep up an amusing conversation, avoiding turf topics as much as possible.

‘Did I tell you, Hawkes, that Craven is going to get married?’ said the marquis.

‘No. Is there money?’

‘I believe not. At least not much.’

‘I knew a young man who got married,’ exclaimed

Dr. Garner, 'and he told me that it was not half so hard to do so as it was to get the furniture, and when it came to getting the bread and butter, he had to fall back upon the old folks.'

'She is a widow.'

'That is worse still. The heart of a widow is like a furnished apartment. One is apt to find something left there by a former lodger.'

'You are very severe, doctor,' said the marquis, laughing.

'When I was in the States last,' observed the doctor, 'I knew a married man who was deliriously happy. He told me in confidence that if he had an ounce more of happiness he could not possibly live. His wife was obliged to roll him on the floor and pat him with a brick-bat every day at stated intervals, to check his exuberance, and keep him from being too happy. But,' added the doctor, drily, 'he was an exception—sort of man one doesn't meet with often.'

'I heard a good story of a jealous husband,' said Hawkes, 'and as we are on matrimonial subjects, I may as well tell it you. The husband suspected his wife and he went to a clairvoyant, asking him to tell him what his wife was then doing. The clairvoyant said he saw her distinctly. She expects some one. The door opens. He comes. She caresses him fondly, he lays his head in her lap, and——. The husband was, by this time, getting frantic; he seized his hair with both hands, and prepared to tear it, but the clairvoyant went on—"and he wags his tail. It is, I suppose, a pet dog." After this the husband calmed down muchly and was at peace.'

'Have you fought any more duels lately?' asked Garner, with a comical expression in his eye.

'Not since you were of such use to me,' replied the marquis.

‘The doctor is a great man,’ remarked Hawkes. ‘He will some day have the freedom of the city presented to him.’

‘In a pill box,’ suggested the marquis.

‘If so, it will not be London ; for I shall go abroad after my friend Rackington has won the Derby,’ said the doctor. ‘It is the only thing that has kept me in this moist climate.’

‘God grant I may,’ ejaculated Rackington, fervently. ‘But what will you do when you are away.’

‘Propagate the gospel in foreign parts, amongst other things.’

‘Or retire to a desert.’

‘That is easy enough. The difficulty is to dwell there, after your arrival,’ said Garner, who had an answer for everybody.

The marquis leaned his head on his hand and seemed wrapped in thought, and Dr. Garner observed that the difference he found between the young nobleman and horse-racing at that moment was—one was pensive, the other expensive.

Remarking that the doctor sipped his wine out of a wine glass, Rackington said—

‘Why don’t you drink your Moselle in tumblers, as I do?’

‘I prefer to make the most of it, and derive more enjoyment from small and repeated draughts, than from those which are few and large,’ answered the doctor. ‘I am a disciple of that Spanish philosopher who always put on his spectacles when he eat cherries, so that they might look the larger and more tempting.’

‘If I win this Derby,’ said Rackington, whose mind ran on one subject, ‘I shall make Craven a handsome present on his marriage.’

‘There is only one thing better than a wedding present, my lord,’ said Doctor Garner.

‘What is that?’

‘A wedding absent,’ answered the witty doctor.

‘By gad, I think you’re right,’ replied the marquis, as he thought of his own domestic affairs and the infelicity he enjoyed.

‘I believe in all that cynicism,’ said Hawkes, ‘about as much as I do in the man in the moon.’

‘The man in the honey-moon would be more appropriate—we are talking of marriage,’ exclaimed Garner.

‘You are incorrigible,’ said Hawkes, who did not like to be pulled up with a pun whenever he spoke. ‘That is a bad and dangerous habit of yours.’

‘Yes, with some people,’ answered the doctor. ‘A patient once receipted a bill of mine. He said I came too often, and he was asked if I called when he was out of danger. “No,” he replied, “I only considered myself in danger so long as he did call.” He made his joke, but he lost his case.’

In this sort of conversation the time slipped away, till past midnight.

The marquis was pleased, and drank deeply, but the wine he took would not perhaps have affected him, if Dr. Garner had not slipped a white powder into his glass, which had the effect of an opiate.

His head fell forward on the table, and he almost immediately sank into a deep slumber.

‘One more glass and I’m off,’ said Hawkes.

‘Everything will be all right,’ rejoined the doctor, mysteriously.

‘What do you mean?’ asked Hawkes.

‘I may look upon Lady Jane as out of the coach.’

‘She will be, practically, a dead un, sir, in less than a couple of hours,’ answered Hawkes.

‘That will do, that is all I wanted to know,’ said the doctor. ‘I count upon this race to enable me to pay my travelling expenses for the next twelve months.’

Hawkes nodded, and putting on his hat went away, walking through the tavern to the stables.

CHAPTER XIV

'THE FIELD AGAINST THE FAVOURITE.'

ON his way he met Grimmer, the tout who inspired the *Sporting Clipper*, and gave it its exclusive information from Halstead.

'Well, Grimmer,' said Mr. Hawkes, who knew everybody, and was well aware that anything he told Grimmer would be all over London before morning. 'How are you going on?'

'Like a milestone at present, for I am standing still, sir,' replied the tout.

Grimmer had been indulging in spirituous liquors, and was in the habit of doing so, as his nose testified that he had high blood in his veins.

'Can you put me up to a wrinkle, Mr. Hawkes?' asked Grimmer. 'I'll leave you some money if ever I happen to have any. I want a bit of luck, I've had none this year, and I'm growing as thin as an old sixpence.'

'If I tell you anything you'll make as much splash as a cock salmon, it will go all over the nation; that's the worst of you publicity fellows,' answered Mr. Hawkes.

'I'm a respectable man, sir. I was brought up to the church, that is to say I once opened the pew doors, and should have been in the position now if I hadn't snored when the parson was preaching, and woke the rest of the congregation. Oh, you may trust me,' said Grimmer.

'If any one says a word against the mare don't you believe them, Grimmer.'

‘I’ll be as blind as a bat and as deaf as a trunkmaker,’ answered Grimmer.

‘But if you have backed her——’

‘Through thick and thin, sir.’

‘Then——’

Grimmer bent forward with intense anxiety to watch what Hawkes was about to say.

‘It may be as well to hedge your money.’

‘Is there anything wrong with Lady Jane, sir?’

‘She’s a little amiss.’

‘God bless me!’ cried Grimmer, laying aside his light and airy manner; ‘I never thought you meant to upset that pot.’

‘What have I to do with it? The horse is not so well, and I am going to the stables now to hear if she is any better.’

‘Is this true, Mr. Hawkes?’

‘As I stand here.’

‘You’re not selling me.’

‘Why should I be?’

‘You’re not, say so,’ pleaded the tout.

‘I’m not. The horse is amiss.’

‘That’ll do, sir, and I thank you kindly for telling me. It’s a straight tip and a good one. I shall know what to do now I see how the wind blows.’

Away went Grimmer to the Telegraph office, forgetting in his excitement to say good-night to Hawkes, who went on, satisfied that every one would know at an early hour that something was amiss with the favourite.

On reaching the stables he found Dale with a light in the private room, to which we have already introduced the reader.

He was smoking, and started up eagerly when he heard

a footstep, but it was impossible to mistake the look of disappointment which appeared on his face when he saw Hawkes.

‘You expected the marquis?’ said the latter.

‘I—I—’ stammered Dale.

‘Don’t tell me any lies,’ exclaimed Hawkes, coarsely; ‘you’re an old man, and an old liar is worse than a young one. You’ve got the soul of a mouse, and you would be glad if the horse could run on its merits, but it shan’t. I’ve come to prevent it.’

‘You know best, but I’m sure Lady Jane can win—there is nothing in the race that can touch her.’

‘That’s all very well, but as I told you before, I can’t afford to chance it. She may win, and she may not. It leaves the door open for flukes. My way is certain. Where is the key?’

‘Of the stable?’

‘Yes.’

‘In my pocket. Is the marquis coming to sleep with the horse as he said?’

‘No, he’s dead drunk in the town. Give me the key

Hawkes lighted a lantern and disappeared in the passage leading to the stable. A key grated in the lock, the door swung back, then it was shut and locked again. Dale sank into a chair, and burying his face in his hands, said, in a low tone which trembled with emotion—

‘It’s a sin. She’s as fine a three-year-old as ever eat hay. It’s a sin, but d—— it, my hands are tied.’

The marquis did not wake very early in the morning, but when he did he ordered some soda and brandy, and asked the waiter how he happened to sleep there. The man was about to reply that he did not know, when Dr.

Garner looked in and explained that it was the fault of the moselle.

Ordering a tub, the marquis made his toilette and came down to breakfast.

By this time Mr. Hawkes and Sir Sutton Courtney had arrived.

Sir Sutton brought news from town.

'They seem to say that Lady Jane is not so well,' he exclaimed.

Every one looked at Hawkes.

'The horse is all right enough,' he replied; 'people must say something.'

'I meant to have stopped at the stable all night,' observed the marquis, 'and should have done so had I not fallen *entre deux vins*. Look at Courtney, Hawkes; he is regarding you as if you were the biggest scoundrel in Europe. Indeed he once told me so. Didn't you, Courtney? Confess the truth.'

'I never say what I think,' answered Sir Sutton Courtney drily.

Mr. Hawkes' eyes scintillated, but his face remained impassive as usual.

'What little money I have on the race is invested on Lady Jane; so if she loses I'm the sufferer,' he said.

'We are all in the same boat,' observed Dr. Garner.

'Is the marchioness coming down?' asked Courtney.

'She will drive down. I expect her about twelve; we have a *rendezvous*.'

'Where, may I ask?'

'Here.'

'It is nearly twelve now.'

As he spoke a carriage pulled up. The marquis looked out of the window and recognised his horses. He ran

downstairs and shook hands through the window with his lovely wife.

‘Will you get out?’ he asked.

‘Not till we reach the stand. Are you coming to the course?’

‘Yes, I have been waiting for you.’

‘I have been quick—an hour and a half. Is that not quick, when the obstructions of the road are considered?’

The marchioness looked at a little carriage clock, delicately wrapped in a velvet case. It was ten minutes to twelve.

‘Is it not pretty?’ she said, as she saw the marquis admiring it. ‘It is quite new. I bought it from Mr. Streeter, and he calls it a baby carriage clock.’

‘Very infantine,’ answered the marquis. ‘Quite an effort of genius. Will you wait a few minutes? Hawkes, Courtney, and Dr. Garner are upstairs. Shall we take them up the hill?’

‘Certainly; are they not your friends?’ replied the marchioness, with a slight tinge of sarcasm in her tone.

Shortly afterwards the party proceeded to the course, and her ladyship was installed in a part of the grand stand which had been set aside for the use of the Marquis of Rackington and his party. Sir Sutton Courtney and Dr. Garner remained with her. Hawkes and Rackington went to the ring.

‘What do you stand to win, my lord?’ asked Hawkes, as they were going along.

‘A couple of hundred thousand.’

‘And I presume lose fifty.’

‘About that,’ replied the marquis. ‘I shall get on a few more thousands, I think.’

They found the mare very firm.

In spite of the sinister rumours which had been in circulation respecting her all the morning, she was well supported at three to one.

Hawkes laid out a little money, but more for the marquis's account than his own. He knew he should lose it, but it was done for the sake of appearances, and when the ring men saw the Halstead party 'potting it on,' they were inclined to shorten the price and bring Lady Jane up to two to one.

At length the time for the horses to start came.

Lady Jane stopped well, and a finer-looking animal it was impossible to imagine. She was pounds better in appearance than when she had last appeared in public, but there was a glassy stare about her eyes which good judges did not like.

The race was run.

Lady Jane ran as tame as a squirrel. From first to last she was never in the race, which was won easily by the Eremité, and the only consolation the marquis had was that neither of Mr. Oatley's horses Braemar and Dee-side got a place.

Loud were the expressions of indignation which arose from the public who had lost their money, and frequent were the volleys of abuse launched against the favourite, who was now called an over-rated animal.

All confidence in the stable was gone.

Hawkes declared she should never run again; but he offered to take fifteen thousand to one about the Peer for the St. Leger.

Not a single bet could he make.

The marquis rejoined his wife after the race and did not appear to be in the least affected by his ill-luck. He was always calm and gentlemanly. Nothing ruffled him.

‘Have you lost much, Harry dear?’ asked his wife.

‘What they would call a fortune in the city,’ he answered.

‘I wish you would give it up,’ she said.

‘Never!’ he rejoined emphatically. ‘I will go on. I will either break the hearts of the book-makers, or they shall break mine.’

His face flushed angrily, and his eyes flashed.

‘You know best of course,’ she went on, ‘but you cannot afford to lose always?’

‘I do not lose always.’

‘I am told a gentleman has not fair play as an owner of race-horses.’

‘Why?’

‘Because he is in the hands of unscrupulous men, and cannot look after his horses himself.’

‘Who told you so?’

‘Sir Sutton Courtney.’

‘Then Courtney would oblige me very much by minding his own business,’ said the marquis.

‘You have lost. You are ill-tempered,’ said the marchioness; ‘will you take me home?’

‘No. I am not going yet, I have some bets on the next race. Hark! the bell is ringing for the course to be cleared. I wish you would not talk as you do. I never lose my temper, as well as my money; one loss is enough.’

‘I do not wish to worry you, dear,’ she said, slipping her hand into his.

‘There, that will do; for God’s sake don’t be sentimental!’ exclaimed the marquis, who, leaning over, saw a man below with a book in his hand. ‘That’s Spool isn’t it’ he added. ‘Spool, what will you lay against Hollybush for this race.’

'Twenty thousand to five, my lord,' was the reply.

'I take it, and I will accept fifty thousand to five about my horse for the St. Leger.'

'We must wait awhile for that, my lord,' answered Spool
'I can't leap in the dark. When I see what your lordship's commissioner means, I shall follow'——

'The stable?'

'No, my lord, my own judgment,' answered the great book-maker, significantly.

'Marie,' said Rackington, as Spool walked away, 'did that fellow mean to be insolent?'

'I thought so,' she answered.

'I have a good mind to——'

He broke off abruptly.

'What, dear?' she asked.

'Oh, nothing; don't bother. They're off. Don't you see, they're off. Hollybush—where's Hollybush? lying close to his horses! He draws ahead, and he'll win! Hollybush wins; a thousand to one on Hollybush!'

'Done, my lord,' said a voice at his elbow.

It was Dr. Garner.

Presently the race was over.

Hollybush won by a neck.

'Bravo,' shouted the marquis, waving his book in the air. 'Bravo. I win on the race. I said I should win. What does Spool think of me now. I knew I should win.'

Turning round he saw Garner.

'Doctor,' he added, 'I shall be obliged to you for a overeign.'

The doctor gave him the money, saying—

'I give it you with pleasure. There is always a chance in these things, and the odds were tempting.'

‘Come, and let us have some champagne. I am not hit so hard as I thought,’ said the marquis.

At eleven o’clock that night he and Sir Sutton Courtney might have been seen at Cremorne, walking arm-in-arm, and looking amusedly at the fiery representation of the winner, which always appears after the fireworks, to see which the mob nearly break their necks, and render themselves hoarse in shouting ‘Oh,’ whenever anything more brilliant than usual breaks upon their astonished and dazzled vision.

CHAPTER XV.

‘THE SPIDER’S NEXT VICTIM.’

THE Marquis of Rackington had luck, he did not lose so much money on the turf as Mr. Hawkes could wish.

The Peer was made a hot favourite for the St. Leger, and Hawkes pursued the same tactics with him for that race as he had done for the Derby.

Ten days before the race the pen was put through his name.

The murmurs of the public this time were loud, long, and deep. They spoke openly, and Rackington was considered by all a mere tool in the hands of an unscrupulous operator.

Christmas came.

Hawkes was on the look out for some means of increasing the private expenditure of the marquis, and chance threw him in the way of a new victim, who by means of her own ruin and shame assisted his plans materially. This was how it happened.

A gentleman named Peterkin, well known in commercial circles, gave a party on Christmas-day. He invited a select party of friends, consisting of himself and his wife, Dr. Thornton, a friend of the family, Mr. Carlston, who had married money, Mr. Timothy Trimble, his clerk, who had expectations, Mrs. Sunbeam, Mr. Grimsby who was always open to conviction, Trixey and a young lady, very pretty and very nice, who was privileged, Mr. Dayler, Miss Madden, Tom Cargo, a sea captain, Mrs. Graves, and Mrs. Bottles, an elderly female slightly addicted to spasms.

Having introduced the readers to the ladies and gentlemen who had received the honour of being invited to Mr. Peterkin's on Christmas-day, Anno Domini uncertain, but not remote, we will follow them into the spacious dining-room, the long table of which groaned beneath the weight of the Norfolk turkeys, the Sussex geese, and the roast beef, which made ambition virtue.

Scarcely had Mr. Peterkin concluded the invocation of a blessing upon the ample repast which smoked upon the mahogany table—scarcely had Dr. Thornton asked Mrs. Peterkin's permission to carve a prodigious turkey which had been placed before her, than Mr. Timothy Trimble got upon his legs, and feebly knocked the bottom of his tumbler against a silver fork, as a sort of semi-idiotic intimation that he prayed for silence.

Trixy was the first to notice the feeble efforts of Mr. Trimble, and, as she sat next to Mr. Peterkin, she flung back her wealth of golden hair, and exclaimed—

‘I really do think there is something the matter with Timothy!’

‘Timothy?’ replied Mr. Peterkin, laying down his knife and fork; ‘I hope he has not been drinking—it is too soon to make a speech. Dear me, I wish he would sit down.’

Just at this moment, Mr. Trimble, quivering like a gentle aspen, and feeling uncomfortably hot, caught the speaker's eye, so to speak, and exclaimed, in quick, short, spasmodic gasps—

‘One word, sir—I am very sorry—but it is imperative that I should call your attention to the ominous circumstance——’

‘Eh?’ said Mr. Peterkin, with a frown that Jove might

have envied. 'Be good enough, young man, to explain yourself!'

Mr. Trimble wiped the perspiration from his classic brow with a spotless cambric handkerchief.

Seeing that all eyes were fixed upon him, he fancied that the present was the supreme moment of his life.

A voice within him seemed to be whispering, 'Pull yourself together, Timothy, and be equal to the occasion.'

He did pull himself together, and he was equal to the occasion.

'I know, sir, that my conduct may appear pretentious,' he continued, 'and I am also fully aware that after dinner comes the proper time to air one's maiden eloquence; but the gigantic interests at stake compel me to speak, even at the risk of offending you, sir, from whom I am proud and grateful to say, I have expectations.'

Rather mollified at the tone of submission adopted by his clerk, the great Peterkin smiled blandly, and a genial at-ease-with-all-mankind expression spread itself over his extensive features as he reflected that tallow which he had been lately buying was slightly on the rise. 'Any one would be justified in supposing,' he said, 'from your serious manner that Peterkin's had stopped payment.'

'May the day be far distant,' promptly replied Mr. Trimble. 'No, sir, the foundations of such a house as Peterkin's are built upon a rock, which can roll back the raging tide of financial panic and stem the torrent of universal bankruptcy.'

A cheer would have inevitably been the reward of this remarkable speech, had not the guests one and all been unusually hungry.

Such is the influence of the stomach upon otherwise rational beings.

‘To the point, Timothy, to the point!’ exclaimed Mr. Peterkin sharply.

‘I beg your pardon, sir, and that of the company generally,’ answered Timothy, with his accustomed humility, ‘especially yours, sir, from whom I am happy to say I have expectations, but the fact has doubtless escaped your notice.’

‘What fact?’ demanded Mr. Peterkin.

‘There are thirteen at the table, sir,’ said Mr. Trimble.

The ominous silence which followed this declaration showed Mr. Trimble that he had shot his shaft well, that he had hit his mark, and that the harmony of the evening was disturbed, as Mrs. Graves confidentially remarked to Mrs. Bottles, ‘for good and all.’

Even dear Mrs. Sunbeam went under a cloud, and Trixie, petted, spoiled, and privileged, turned a shade paler.

Everybody began to count heads.

Yes, the fact was indisputable, there were thirteen, and the knowledge of the fatal number caused a shudder to convulse each individual member of the party.

‘Very unfortunate,’ said Mr. Peterkin, ‘can’t imagine how it happened. I hope nobody will mind. It is unlucky, certainly, but——’

Mrs. Graves rose and said—

‘With your permission, Mr. Peterkin, I will say that I for one am not going to sign my own death warrant.’

‘Nor I,’ said Miss Madden, decidedly; ‘the prejudices of society and the experience of years must be respected.’

‘My dear ladies——’ began Mr. Peterkin.

‘The dinner’s getting cold,’ said Mr. Dayler, who had an eye to the loaves and fishes.

‘I would as soon think of going to sea on a Friday, or shooting an albatross,’ remarked Tom Cargo.

‘Dear me, I feel quite faint; may I trouble you for a glass of sherry wine, it may keep off the spasms, with which I am troubled at times,’ observed Mrs. Bottles, who never neglected an opportunity.

‘I think it’s all nonsense,’ said Mr. Carlston, who was strong-minded.

‘Well, we’ll call in the butler,’ said Mrs. Peterkin, who thought she saw a way out of the difficulty.

Nevertheless she trembled at the reflection that the butler, in spite of his white tie, and his irreproachable swallow-tail coat, was only an illiterate grocer in disguise.

‘Mr. Peterkin, sir,’ exclaimed Mr. Trimble, meekly, ‘as I am the indirect cause of this interruption to our long-looked-for and anxiously-expected social enjoyment, I will, with your permission, sir, quit the table temporarily, and go into the highways and byeways, and pick up a *fourteenth* guest promiscuously, as one may say.’

‘Capital,’ said Trixy, laughing merrily at the idea; ‘it will be quite an adventure.’

Mr. Peterkin hesitated—‘As my wife says, there is the butler,’ he hazarded.

‘Allow me to have my own way in this instance,’ persisted Mr. Trimble. ‘It is true that from you, sir, I have expectations, and I should be sorry, especially sorry to——’

‘Yes, yes, we know all that,’ interrupted Mr. Peterkin.

‘My good sir,’ Mr. Trimble went on, as he made a low bow to the nearest salt cellar, ‘I stand corrected; but I was about to say, that when I am gone there will be twelve, a number against which no one can say anything, and I promise faithfully, upon my word of honour, that I will not come back without somebody, if it’s only a wait or a crossing-sweeper.’

There was a laugh at this, and Mrs. Peterkin said—

‘I think Timothy is right, my dear, and we’ll keep his dinner warm for him.’

There being no dissentient voice, Mr. Trimble got up and was going away, when Dr. Thornton exclaimed—

‘It’s very cold without, and was just beginning to snow as I came in, and if Mr. Trimble will allow me to prescribe a stirrup cup, or, in plain language, a glass of grog——’

‘A little sherry in a tumbler, if you please,’ mildly corrected Mr. Trimble.

Being fortified with this harmless beverage, Mr. Trimble bowed to the company generally, and went into the hall, put on his greatcoat, comforter, and hat.

The front door slammed to with a sudden bang—Timothy Trimble was gone. Soon the plates began to clatter, the turkeys were cut up, the beef smoked in many slices, and all was jollity and goodfellowship.

In the meantime Mr. Trimble was in the street, standing still in the fast falling snow, uncertain which way to go.

The wind tore down the street in all the wanton violence of its might, dashing the soft snow into every imaginable nook and cranny, and piling it high up in drifts against the area railings and doorsteps.

Turning to the right Mr. Trimble walked slowly along. A neighbouring church clock struck the hour of six; the gas lamps flared and flickered, and were scarcely visible through the blinding snow.

‘Well, I must say,’ observed Mr. Trimble, who was admirable in a soliloquy, ‘I must say that I have got myself into a good thing. I feel as if I had invested my hard-earned savings in the United Soapsuds Bubble-and-burst Company, or that I had mortgaged my expectations from Mr. Peterkin’s for a mess of pottage.’

Stopping to look about him for a moment, he went on in a tone of bitter remonstrance—

‘Don’t you think, Timothy, my good fellow, that you’ve done a clever thing? Where’s your Christmas dinner, Timothy? Why couldn’t you hold your tongue, Timothy? What did you want to go and call attention to the fatal number for, Timothy?’

Receiving no answers to the above questions, he added in a tone of concentrated irony—

‘It’s all owing to that restless longing for notoriety that will some day get you into Parliament, as the representative of a metropolitan borough, Timothy.’

Suddenly his eye fell upon an individual who was standing under a portico; he was covered with snow, and seemed out of his reckoning.

The house was shut up, and Timothy could see a bill in the window.

The house was to let.

Timothy made bold enough to speak to the stranger.

‘Excuse me, sir,’ said Timothy, ‘I do not ask from any impertinent curiosity, but will you oblige me by telling me where you are going to dine to-day?’

‘I don’t know,’ replied the stranger, abruptly.

Timothy rubbed his hands with glee.

‘This is a bit of luck,’ he mentally remarked, ‘I shall come in with the pudding.’

‘Thank you,’ he said, ‘I am glad to hear that you are, so to say, disengaged, as I have what I may call a roving commission to pick up a guest promiscuously, as our party consisted of thirteen, and we want another to make everything comfortable, and be a sort of sacrificial offering to popular superstition and prejudice.’

‘Are you in earnest?’ said the stranger.

‘On my word as a man,’ said Timothy.

‘Then I accept your invitation,’ said the stranger. ‘I came to this house to dine, having done so every Christmas-day for the last ten years; being a privileged person I didn’t wait for an invitation. On my arrival, I found the house shut up, and I was debating as to what I should do, when you accosted me.’

‘Take my arm, sir, I am delighted!’ cried Timothy. ‘Don’t be offended, sir, if I hold you rather tight. The fact is, sir, the inner man’s got his eye on a Norfolk turkey, and I’m afraid of losing you.’

The stranger smiled, and Timothy noticed that he was a man of about forty-five years of age—tall, well-dressed, and having an air of ease and repose which characterises one accustomed to good society.

The first course had not disappeared when Timothy re-entered the dining-room with his prize.

‘I’ve got a volunteer, sir,’ he exclaimed; ‘I picked him up promiscuously.’

‘I hope I am none the worse for that,’ said the stranger, laughing. ‘Although I have been introduced into your society in such a peculiar way, I trust no apology is necessary for my unexpected presence.’

‘None at all, sir; sit down, I beg, by my side—the post of honour, if I may be allowed the expression.’

The stranger gave his hat and coat to the nearest servant, took his seat, and furtively handed a card to Mr. Peterkin, which the latter glanced at and nodded his head approvingly.

The dinner, as may be imagined, was a great success. Trixey sat opposite the stranger and regarded him with rather more interest than was consistent with strict etiquette.

He in his turn was rather lavish of his regard in Trixey's direction.

After the cloth was removed, and dessert placed upon the table, a steaming bowl of punch, which was carried by two men, was placed before Mr. Peterkin. More logs were piled upon the fire, and amicable conversation flowed on gaily.

The name on the card was Reginald Hawkes, and the interest he took in Trixey was caused by a belief that her beauty would dazzle the marquis, and that the latter, if he could bring them in contact, would spend a fortune over her if he could succeed in making her love him.

Hawkes was hungering after the property of the young nobleman, and he determined not to stop at any means of making him spend money, which of course he must borrow at ruinous interest.

The party did not separate till a late hour. Trixey was staying with Mr. Peterkin, and Mr. Hawkes received a pressing invitation to come and see them again shortly.

This he promised to do.

His intention was to bring the Marquis of Rackington with him, and make him play the unenviable part of a titled seducer.

CHAPTER XVI.

‘OATLEY’S REVENGE.’

WE will not dwell upon a most repulsive passage in the career of the Marquis of Rackington.

Let it suffice to say that Mr. Hawkes succeeded in his nefarious designs, that is, he repaid the hospitality he had received from Mr. Peterkin with the grossest ingratitude.

Trixeys and the marquis were brought together, the latter made the young girl love him, and taking her away from her friends, established her at the West End, causing a fresh scandal in fashionable society.

This soon came to the knowledge of Mr. Oatley, who, desirous that the Marchioness of Rackington should be made aware of the circumstance, endeavoured to get a paragraph placed in a sporting paper, which he would take care was brought under the notice of Marriette.

If he could produce a separation between the marchioness and her husband he felt that he would obtain a satisfactory revenge for the refusal of his hand, which yet rankled in his breast.

Walking along the Strand one day he met a school-fellow of his, whose position in life was of a precarious nature. Having heard that he was in some way connected with the newspapers, Mr. Oatley stopped him, thinking that he would be able to procure an insertion for a paragraph, damaging to the character of the marquis, in the *Sporting Clipper*, or some similar print.

Bedloe, which was the name of his friend, glad of the

meeting, willingly consented to walk up Pall Mall, and lunch at Oatley's club.

While at lunch Mr. Oatley induced his old schoolfellow, by the skilful application of champagne, to confide his history to him, or at least that part which led to his being connected with the literature of the day.

This is the *petite histoire* with which the young man of versatile genius, but slender resources, favoured his *quandam* acquaintance.

'Benjamin Bedloe, Esq., who has the honour of being my father, and after whom I was named, for many years entertained the firm conviction that I was an incorrigible scamp. I am not prepared to say that his conviction was altogether unfounded, a scrupulous regard for the truth will not permit me to do so. Nor, when he turned me out of his house at the early age of eighteen, could I conscientiously question the wisdom and propriety of the proceeding.

'Thrown upon my own resources, and landed in the "little village" of London, with half a sovereign in my pocket, a doubtful bill of exchange, which no one in my immediate neighbourhood would have discounted at ninety-nine and a half per cent., I felt an amount of depression which was perhaps justifiable under the circumstances.

'Being of a mercurial disposition, I threw off the incubus, and expended a small part of my available capital in such stimulants as I thought best calculated to cheer the inner man, as this mysterious and exacting being was, at times, given to indulging in low spirits to a shameful extent.

'While in a state of uncertainty I was touched on the elbow by a man whom I instantly recognised as an old schoolfellow.

'Jack Harmer had always been of a wayward and Bohemian disposition, and, to judge from his attire,

Bohemia had not treated him with that consideration which he had a right to expect. I related my history to him, and in return he favoured me with his; but, in order that the recital might be given under favourable circumstances, we adjourned to his lodgings, which were in the neighbourhood, up three pairs of stairs, and looking out upon a dismal yard, containing a water-butt, a cat, and some lines covered with clothes hung out to dry. Upon a table was a bottle of gin, a wine-glass, some blotting-paper, foolscap torn into slips, ink, and two pens rather the worse for wear.

‘Upon another were several bottles, a pile of letters, various chemical preparations—so they appeared to me to be—labels, lead paper, printed circulars, and some copies of the daily papers.

“Behold my stock-in-trade!” said Jack Harmer.

“What does it mean?” I inquired.

“I am an author,” he replied, “also the fortunate proprietor of an oriental cosmetic. My business is increasing; I want a partner and shall be happy to associate myself with you. The fact is I am living on my wits, and have been for some time past.”

“Is it a profitable occupation?”

“Yes and no. Sometimes one and sometimes the other. Look at this. Here’s an idea for you. I make people beautiful for ever, at least they fancy so, though chalk and milk of roses are the chief ingredients in the preparation. Read that advertisement. I put that in the daily and weekly papers. The country papers I have three months’ credit for, the others are cash.”

‘I took a slip of paper and read the following—

“A Baptism of Beauty—Kafocrysm. A charming com-

plexion guaranteed by the use of this infallible oriental *cosmetic*, employed in the harems of Persia and Turkey. As a remedy for freckles, roughness of the skin, impeded perspiration, etc., Kalocrysm is unrivalled. Post free, thirteen stamps, only of the sole consignee, Burton Edwards, 8, Carson Street, W.C."

"Are you Burton Edwards?" I asked, laughing immoderately.

"I am," was the reply. "Look at the labels."

He handed me a piece of magenta-coloured paper, on which was written—

"Lasting Beauty.

"The Secret of Loveliness in the Turkish Harems.

"Kalocrysm,

"A Baptism of Beauty.

"For imparting a peerless complexion of dazzling beauty to young and old, surpassing anything ever introduced amongst the Western nations.

"Kalocrysm has for many years been in constant use in the Royal harems of Persia and Turkey, at Herat and Constantinople. Its excellences are unanimously admitted and extolled; and the soft brilliancy of complexion for which the ladies of Stamboul are widely celebrated is entirely owing to the employment of this infallible Oriental compound, which is perfectly innocuous to the skin and may be applied, without the slightest trouble or apprehension.

"Directions for Use.

"Dissolve the powder in a pint of rain water, which

must be boiling hot. When cool, anoint the face and hands night and morning with the wash, which will be found a delicious and soothing emollient.

“N.B.—Against roughness of the skin, freckles, impeded perspiration, coarseness of complexion, &c., Kalocrysm is a guaranteed preventive.”

“Does it go?” I queried.

“Like steam with the women,” answered my friend Jack Harmer, adding, “here’s another label that goes on the packet.”

“He gave me a smaller piece of paper on which was printed—

“Kalocrysm,

“A Novelty amongst the Western nations for beautifying the complexion and softening the skin.

“Recently imported from the East.

“In packets, 1s. each, or 10s. 6d. per dozen.

“Isn’t it *infra dig.*,” I asked, “for the son of a gentleman?—I think you’re the son of a gentleman—”

“The dad’s a parson, if that is anything towards it,” answered Jack, carelessly. “Established Church of course. As for being below one’s dignity, I don’t study that when I’m hard up, and want the staff of life, and the other necessities, such as sheep, cow, pig, &c. Besides the Kalocrysm, I’m doing a penny serial.”

“What’s that?” I inquired in my ignorance.

“Bless your simplicity,” said Jack, “it’s what the people buy for their mental edification, like their pudding, in penny slices.”

“I’ve hit upon a splendid title; we’ve got a rattling artist and do 20,000 a week. It’s called—

‘“The Men of Mystery,
“or,
“The Chamber of Horrors, and the Hidden Tombs.
“Containing,
“Full particulars of the
“Dark Denizens of the Caves of Death,
“The Sable Executioners and the Black Bandits
“Of the Sea-girt Caverns.’
“It’s one D weekly, No. 2 gratis with No. 1, and superbly
illustrated. Doesn’t that take your breath away?”

‘I found after a little experience that I had a turn for literature, and improving by practice I helped my friend in his serial work, and we did a roaring trade between us, turning the trash out by the yard and filling the brains of all the boys in London with horrible nightmares.

‘By degrees I got into the way of reporting and writing paragraphs for tradesmen, who gave me their advertisements in return, and now I believe I can get anything put in anywhere.’

‘I will give you a cheque for ten pounds,’ exclaimed Mr. Oatley, ‘if you will obtain insertion for something I am going to write in a sporting paper.’

‘The *Clipper* is open.’

‘That will do.’

Mr. Oatley took out his pocket-book and wrote on a slip of paper—

“A NEW SCANDAL.

‘We regret to have to announce that the conduct of the young Marquis of Rackington is of such a nature as to threaten a separation between him and his lovely wife, who cannot tolerate a notorious profligate rival in the suburbs.’

He handed this to Bedloe, who glanced over it and shook his head.

‘Won’t it do?’ inquired Mr. Oatley.

‘No good at all,’ answered Bedloe.

‘Will you correct it?’

‘Certainly. Lend me your pencil.’

Bedloe wrote rapidly for a short space, and then looking up with a triumphant glance, said—‘Hear this.’

‘Go on,’ exclaimed Mr. Oatley.

“LADY JANE IN THE SUBURBS!

“We are given to understand that the little Marquis of R—k—t—n, is at his old game again. The attractions of a superb home, and a really lovely wife, are not sufficient to keep his vicious and roving propensities within bounds. The diminutive lordling, it is said, has induced a fair but frail damsel to quit the shelter of the paternal roof, and live in meretricious splendour, and under his openly avowed protection, in a fashionable suburb. We hear that this is a source of unqualified regret to the noble lord’s friend, philosopher, and guide, Mr. H—k—s, commonly called the Bravo of Bruton Street.

“It is said that proceedings will promptly be taken in that mysterious court, presided over by Sir J. P. Wilde, which will extinguish the unholy flame which at present irradiates the doubtful atmosphere of Brompton.

“While assuring the marchioness of our deep sympathy, we should not be doing our duty if we refrained from expressing our abhorrence of the shameless profligacy which at present obtains in high places, and among the so-called hereditary legislators of this favoured land, and we trust that the Marquis of R—k—t—n,

will see the error of his ways ere it be too late, and make what atonement lies in his power to the unhappy lady whose affections he has so wantonly outraged."

'That is the style, sir, for the *Clipper*,' added Bedloe, when he had finished reading his paragraph. 'I haven't been at it all these years for nothing. There is nothing libellous in what I have said, though I have sailed as close to the wind as I possibly could.'

Mr. Oatley smiled in expressing his approval of the paragraph as it stood, and gave Bedlow the ten pounds he had promised him.

On the following Saturday this 'Note on News' appeared in the columns of the *Sporting Clipper*, and was much commented on by all who read it.

It had the honour of being copied into several journals, and among them a paper which the marchioness was in the habit of seeing.

When she read it, she could not doubt that her husband was intended by the Marquis of R.

It was in the middle of winter when Mr. Oatley dealt her this cruel blow. She had been staying at Halstead with her mother. The marquis came down from London occasionally to hunt, but he spent most of his time in town. His health had been giving way latterly under the incessant dissipation to which he gave himself up.

When Marriette read the scandal copied from the *Sporting Clipper* Rackington was at Halstead. He was very unwell. The cold weather affected his chest, and he had not been out of the house since his arrival, owing to the snow and cold winds.

The marquis was attended to by an old and privileged servant who filled the post of housekeeper, and who had served him when a boy. Her name was Bondsman, and it

was through her garrulity that he first knew of the shock his wife had received, through reading the mischievous paragraph concocted by the ingenious Mr. Bedloe.

He was reclining on a sofa, his head propped up with pillows, reading a book, when Mrs. Bondsman entered with some medicine which he was to take at stated intervals. More likely would it have been for the moon to have dropped from her sphere than for Mrs. Bondsman to forget the hour of torture when the nauseous mess was to be imbibed.

If there was one thing more than another in which Mrs. Bondsman was a rigid disciplinarian, it was in making people take their medicine.

To refuse to do so was, in her eyes, a most heinous crime, and one for which there was no forgiveness.

She—worthy woman—had an extraordinary facility for swallowing pills. She would look at you steadily and say, ‘Bless you, she could take a box full!’

If any friend of Mrs. Bondsman, to whom the word pill was a noun substantive of choking misery, refused to swallow the highly nutritive composition, she would, to encourage him and stimulate his flagging energies, take a piece of bread and roll it up into a dozen circular pellets the size of peas, and swallow them one after the other, like an inhabitant of the kingdom of Brobdingnag with cannibal proclivities, satisfying his appetite upon tender and toothsome Lilliputians.

The marquis drank a wineglass full of some pink mixture which had nothing more noxious in it than bark and quinine, and handed back the glass submissively, if not thankfully.

It is something terrible to be in the power, as it were, of a self-willed and strong-minded woman when ill. He knew this, and was wise in his generation.

At first he was hopeful that, having administered the thumbscrew, Mrs. Bondsman would forego the pleasures of the rack, but in this belief he was mistaken. Setting the glass, and the bottle with the mixture, upon the table, she comfortably deposited herself in an armchair, cleared her throat with a preliminary cough, and prepared for a little dissertation on the wickedness of the world, and more especially of the Marquis of Rackington.

‘It’s my belief, my lord,’ she began, ‘that the mixture the doctor’s sending you is doing you no good. I’ve seen a deal of illness myself, having been nurse at an infirmary afore I went into the late lord, your father’s service, which is a thing I don’t regret, for the responsibilities and trials are awful. In my humble opinion, pink stuff, like that on the table, never does nobody no good!’

The negative exclamation with which this speech concluded, raised a faint smile to the marquis’s lips; but he contented himself with nodding his head affirmatively, knowing that he must allow her to speak as long as she liked, as he was unable to rid himself of the infliction, and therefore compelled to bear it as well as he could.

‘You may be thankful, my lord, that you are getting better. I can tell in a moment how people are,’ continued Mrs. Bondsman. ‘It was only yesterday that I said to Sarah O’Malley that she was sickening for a fever, and sure enough she was raving and insensible by ten o’clock this morning. Now, my lord, I know it’s not for me to dictate to the likes of you; for if you don’t look after the pence, and let the pounds take care of themselves, you are a nobleman, and will some day, I hope, be a great man; but not if you go on as you have been a going on lately. Oh, no, my lord, not by no means!’

‘Pray what do you mean?’ said Rackington, wincing,

and feeling angry under the affliction; thinking that if it continued he should die of housekeeper on the brain.

‘Why, my lord, just this: I know it’s the usual thing for young gentlemen what is in the gay world to take to music-halls and late hours, but they never come to no good. It’s what they call sowing their wild oats, but nine out of ten never live to reap tame ones. That, my lord, that’s what I mean!’

‘No doubt you mean well,’ said the marquis, ‘and I am much obliged to you for your advice, but believe me just at this moment I don’t feel equal to listening to you.’

‘Very well, my lord, that is a hint to me to go. I must confess I don’t like hints. I would rather people spoke out plainly to me any day in the year; but hypocrisy comes, like other things, of staying out at nights, and music-halls, which a comic song’s one thing, but it’s bad company, and what comes after. I wish I was Queen Victoria.’

‘Or Pope of Rome?’ suggested the marquis, mildly.

‘No, my lord; I’m a Protestant, was born and brought up as such, and will, please God, die as such, preferring the faith of my fathers and not holding with Romans—that is to say, Catholics—what worships images and goes to confession. That’s not me, my lord; but if I was Queen, things would be very different, for the alterations I’d make nobody would suppose.’

‘I was saying——’

‘Yes, I know, my lord. You give me a hint, and I’m about to take it. I never obtrude my society when it’s not wanted. Though I nursed you when a child, and it grieves me to the heart for to see it.’

‘See what, my good creature?’

‘What’s going on, my lord. Her ladyship’s in a dreadful taking this morning, all through reading of the paper.’

‘What paper?’

‘I don’t know the name of it, my lord, but I’ll go and get it,’ replied the housekeeper.

‘Do so,’ said the marquis.

Mrs. Bondsman went away, returning presently with the paper, and pointing out the paragraph which she had seen the marchioness read, and which had affected her so strangely.

Rackington perused it in silence, but his face clouded and grew black as night. He dismissed Mrs. Bondsman curtly, after thanking her, and, stirring the fire, peered into its depths in a melancholy manner.

The marchioness, in the meantime, was much perturbed and indulged in a good fit of crying to calm her agitation, taking a walk in the garden. After a time she dried her tears, and summoned her pride to her aid, when she thought that her husband was a cruel deceiver. After first thoughts come second thoughts, and in the secondary stage she considered it just possible that she might be mistaken. At all events she resolved, while being cool, to suspend her judgment.

Wiping her eyes with her pocket-handkerchief, and then rubbing them with some snow to cool them—which, by the way, had a directly opposite effect—she walked slowly back to the house, and sought her bedroom.

On the stairs she met her mother. Now mothers, as a class, have a wonderful prescience, and are very keen in their vision; the Countess Morton was no exception to the rule. She saw at a glance that Marriette had been, in common parlance, ‘upset,’ and she had no sooner made the discovery than she determined to discover the cause. This

was not a very difficult task, for Marriette was only too happy to find some one to unburden her mind to.

‘My dear child, what *have* you been doing? Your face is as red as fire!’ exclaimed the countess.

‘Oh! mamma, I am very, very unhappy!’ responded Marriette.

‘Indeed! and why? Where are you going—to your bedroom? I will go with you.’

When that *sanctum sanctorum* was reached, the countess closed the door. Marriette threw herself on the bed, and began to cry. Then her mother took up a bottle containing toilet vinegar, and bathed her daughter’s forehead with the refreshing fluid.

‘Speak to me, dearest. Tell me the cause of your grief,’ she said. ‘You know I am your friend, and will assist you with my advice, and in any other way.’

When Marriette began to recite her wrongs she ceased to weep. She sat up, and became almost eloquent.

‘If this is true, I should advise you to insist on a separation and separate maintenance. When things get talked about, it is time to stand upon one’s dignity,’ exclaimed the Countess Morton.

‘I hate him, mamma. I never did like him really in my heart, and he has treated me so badly,’ replied Marriette.

‘He is in the study. Seek him, my dear child, and demand an explanation. If you are firm, and he sees you will not tolerate such conduct, your resolute demeanour may be productive of a good result.’

‘I will try.’

Marriette wiped her eyes, and without further consideration went downstairs. She knocked at the door of the room in which the marquis was, and he opened it, admitting her.

She was so agitated that for a few minutes she could not speak.

The marquis knew directly he saw her what she had come for, and became as pale as a sheet.

Closing the door he sat down in his old place before the fire. Many and swift thoughts were coursing through his active brain. Marriette did not interrupt him. She leant against the wall with her arms folded, and bent an eagle glance upon him, watching every turn and change in his countenance, which did not present much that was legible, it being singularly impassive.

A new feeling had arisen in her breast. Up to the present time she had been as loving as a dove, and as harmless; but her husband's conduct had instilled some of the wisdom, not to say the poison, of the serpent into her.

She felt that she had the power to sting, and she determined that like a snake, she would elongate her spiral coils and do her worst if she were driven to it. This feeling arose in the first moment of disappointment, rage, and chagrin, and was likely enough to give place to others of a milder kind when she was alone, and able to deliberate calmly over what had taken place.

A desperate woman is at all times a creature to be avoided. She has much power for evil, and plenty of inclination, not tempered by judgment. Marriette might be made loving and devotional, or very potent for mischief. She would be what he made her.

'What do you want with me?' he asked at length, in a stony voice.

'I have seen a paragraph in a public print which is of such a scandalous nature that I must in justice to myself request an explanation,' she answered.

'Does it concern me?'

‘It does. But why ask, when I see the very journal in question on your table?’ Marriette exclaimed.

Further concealment was useless.

He remained silent.

‘Is it true?’ she asked.

‘Yes. I suppose it is true enough,’ the marquis answered, fidgetting uneasily on his chair.

‘Is this sort of thing to continue?’

‘I don’t know. I suppose it must take its chance.’

Marriette pressed her hands upon her heart, to still its violent beating.

‘Do you expect me to—to bear it?’

‘I expect nothing. Blessed are they who expect nothing for they shall not be disappointed. That is the eighth beatitude, isn’t it?’

‘I beg you will not further outrage my feelings,’ exclaimed Marriette, ‘by turning this sad affair into ridicule. If you admit that you no longer love me?’

She paused to see if he would say anything in contradiction to this assertion, but he remained obstinately silent.

‘There’s nothing for it,’ she went on, ‘but for us to separate.’

‘With all my heart.’

‘Good-bye, Harry. We may never meet again,’ Marriette continued, in a voice of deep feeling.

He held out his hand without rising. She touched it with the tips of her fingers, and made as if she would quit the apartment.

Rising with alacrity he opened the door, and bowed to her as she passed out.

Thus the husband and wife parted.

Such was Mr. Oatley’s revenge.

They did meet again. This ill-assorted pair, they met once, but it was at the deathbed of the marquis. When a mere wreck of his former self, and utterly broken down, he sent for her to soothe his last moments.

CHAPTER XVII.

‘THE FALL OF THE CURTAIN.’

WHEN the separation took place between the Marquis or Rackington and his wife, he was like a man without a home. No restraint was placed upon his actions, and he ‘plunged’ more heavily than he had done before.

His losses on the turf were very heavy, so much so, that, unable to pay his losses on a particular race, Spool the bookmaker openly demanded that the Jockey Club should warn him off Newmarket Heath as a defaulter. This was a great blow to his pride, and contributed to the decline which took place in his health about this particular time. He went to the German baths, but did not derive much benefit from their use, as he did not follow the advice of his medical men, which was to keep quiet, live regularly and avoid all excitement.

He had a restless longing for amusement and dissipation of some sort, and he would have it; going to bed late, and drinking more than was good for him, at all hours of the day and night.

His friends, and he had a few as long as his money lasted, saw that this suicidal course of living could have but one result. They did what they could to restrain and keep him within bounds, but without avail; he would have his own way.

After staying in Paris for some months, he came back to London, and was taken so seriously ill, that he was confined to his house in Grosvenor Square.

Mr. Hawkes came to see him, and was shocked to behold

the alteration which a short time had made in him. He was thin and emaciated ; his complexion was of a delicate hue, generally perceived in consumptive people, and he looked like one whom Death had already tapped on the shoulder, as he lay on the sofa, with a bottle of champagne and a glass on a table by his side. He could not smoke cigars now, but he took an occasional pull at a Turkish hubble bubble which stood on a chair, the long tube of which he held in his hand.

‘Good morning, my lord,’ exclaimed Mr. Hawkes ; ‘I am sorry to find you so bad ; they tell me you’re not the cheese at all.’

‘I am deuced ill,’ replied the marquis, ‘but I shall get all right again presently. It’s that confounded knocking about at night which plays the bear with me. I’m not strong enough to stand it now ; I was once—’

‘Ah,’ said Mr. Hawkes sententiously, ‘a few years makes a difference when a man goes the pace. It’s the pace that kills. What with the lush and the night work and all that, heaps of fellows get their six feet of ground dug out for them. You take my advice, my lord ; it’s a fool’s advice, perhaps, but you take it—turn this sort of life up. It isn’t good enough—cut it.’

Rackington waved his hand in a feeble manner.

‘Don’t preach,’ he said, ‘and in such a pulpit style. Talk about business. What became of that girl you brought me to, that—what was her name, Trixey, wasn’t it ?’

‘Yes.’

‘What became of her ?’

Mr. Hawkes hesitated.

‘How you do worry !’ said the marquis, impatiently ; ‘you’ve got a tongue in your head, haven’t you. What became of Trixey ?’

‘She went home after you left her, and refused to take any money. I heard a week or two back that she was found dead in her bed.’

‘Was there an inquest?’

‘No; the doctor certified that death occurred through natural causes. It was a broken heart, some said.’

‘Bosh!’ ejaculated Rackington.

Mr. Hawkes was silent.

‘Have you anything else to tell me?’ inquired the marquis at length.

‘I think, my lord, your stud ought to be sold,’ answered Mr. Hawkes.

‘What for?’

‘You are embarrassed, and I can no longer supply you with money. You know that I have had the management of your affairs——’

‘Have ruined me. I’ll supply the gap,’ interrupted the marquis. ‘Sell the horses if you like. I can’t help it.’

‘If your lordship will only trust me—that is to say, continue to trust me, all will be well. Your affairs are in a terrible state of confusion, but I do not despair of putting them straight before long.’

‘Hawkes!’ exclaimed the marquis, suddenly, and in a solemn manner.

‘My lord!’ replied the great financier.

‘Last night I dreamt I was at Halstead. It’s sold now, and of course I have nothing to do with it. You sold it to pay yourself, and no doubt you were perfectly right. Well, I was at Halstead, and I saw a white squirrel run across the lawn; that is an omen.’

‘Of what, my lord?’ inquired Hawkes, under his breath.

‘Of death.’

‘But’——

‘Don’t contradict me. A white squirrel is always seen at Halstead, when a Rackington is going to die. I told you just now I should get better, I tell every one so, but I *know* very well that I shall never hold up my head again; I am booked!’

‘Nonsense, my lord; don’t talk like that,’ exclaimed Mr. Hawkes. ‘You’ll get a new lease.’

The marquis shook his head mournfully.

‘I know my affairs are all sixes and sevens,’ the marquis said, ‘but I trust to you, Hawkes, to do the best you can for me. I have a wife, you know, whom I have not treated too well, and I should not like her to be left poorly off. Be generous, Hawkes, you have made a good thing out of me. Think that we don’t live for this world alone.’

Mr. Hawkes protested that he was generosity itself, and that he would do the best he could to extricate the marquis’s affairs from the disastrous complication in which they were.

Rackington slowly but surely grew worse. At length he was obliged to take to his bed altogether.

His friends came to see him—Captain Craven, Ord Parker, Sir Sutton Courtney, and the rest of them. Dr. Garner had gone to the Brazils some said, others, to Hong-Kong; nobody seemed exactly to know where he had gone, but he was not in England.

The legend respecting the white squirrel of Halstead was a peculiar one. It was said to be a fact that a squirrel of a spotless white colour was always seen on the lawn at Halstead before the death of a member of the Rackington family. From the words which the marquis had let fall in Mr. Hawkes’ presence it will be seen that he was a firm believer in this superstition.

Sir Sutton Courtney tried hard to cheer his friend, but he could not disguise from himself the fact that, as Mr. Hawkes graphically expressed it, he was 'bound for the mole country.' A short time before his death Rackington declared that he was better, and that he 'should be all right if he was not so confoundedly weak.' It was but the flicker of the lamp before it expired and became finally extinguished. At length came that period in a man's life when it is the doctor's melancholy duty to tell his patient that if he wishes to put his worldly affairs in order, he ought to do so, as his malady may take an unexpected and dangerous turn, &c.

'Upon my word I don't know what I have to leave,' the marquis said to Courtney; 'everything is in such an awful muddle. Here, give me a slip of paper and a pen.'

Sir Sutton Courtney did so, and he hastily wrote on half a sheet of note paper—

'I, being encompassed by the shadow of death, do hereby bequeath wholly, solely, and unreservedly to my wife Marriette, Marchioness of Rackington all that I die possessed of after my just debts are paid, wishing her to give my valet Randall an annuity of fifty pounds for his life, and I appoint my friend Sir Sutton Courtney my sole executor.'

He signed this will, and Sir Sutton witnessed it, Randall being called in as well to attest it.

'That's legal, isn't it?' asked the marquis.

'I think so,' replied Courtney.

'It's brief, and to the point. I hate the forms of lawyers. You will have it carried out.'

'To the letter, but I hope——'

'Yes, I know you do,' interrupted the marquis—'still
'it is of no use to tell me a pack of rubbish!'

through, it is more than either you or I can expect. I am afraid I have not lived a good life ; have I ? Have I been average, do you think, Courtnay ?'

'As the world goes, yes.'

'What a rascally world it must be, then,' answered the marquis, with a smile.

A few days afterwards he sent for his wife.

'I want to see Marriette,' he said. 'I think I shall be happier if she says she forgives me. The way I have behaved to her has not been good form at all.'

The marchioness came and was dreadfully shocked to see the state he was reduced to.

'Oh, Harry ! Why did you not let me know this before ? I would have flown to you.'

'I did not want to worry you, dear,' he answered ; 'it is a bore to be with a man who is on his way to the great unknown.'

'What can I do for you, my poor love ?' she asked, with sobs.

'Forgive me, that's all.'

'I do forgive you. God knows I do. What else ?'

'Don't make a fuss, there's a good child, that's all. Tell Randall to bring me some champagne. The doctor says I may have sparkling wine.'

And so he passed away.

Careless to the last. Light, and even gay at times—a very butterfly, fluttering in the face of the wind that carries destruction in its breath.

He could scarcely speak. His words came from him in whispers. He beckoned to Marriette, who was present with Sir Sutton Courtnay and the usual crowd, doctor, nurse, valet, Ord Parker, Captain Craven, the Dowager Marchioness, and Countess Morton, who came to see him every day.

‘Where’s Hawkes?’ said he.

The great financier entered the room on tiptoe as he spoke.

‘Come nearer,’ exclaimed the marquis.

Mr. Hawkes approached the bedside where the attenuated frame was extended, and leant over his too apt pupil.

‘Hawkes,’ the Marquis of Rackington exclaimed, ‘I’ll take the odds to a monkey that Merry’s horse, Belladrum, wins the two thousand and Derby. Do you take me?’

‘My lord—’ stammered Mr. Hawkes.

‘Do you take me?’ repeated the marquis, with a touch of his old impetuosity.

‘Certainly, my lord, I’ll lay you the odds.’

‘Done. Book it, and if I win, give the money to—to—Ran—Ran—Randall.’

His voice became so weak, and his utterance so impeded, that it was with difficulty the name was heard.

In ten minutes after making the wager the Marquis of Rackington was a dead man.

THE END.

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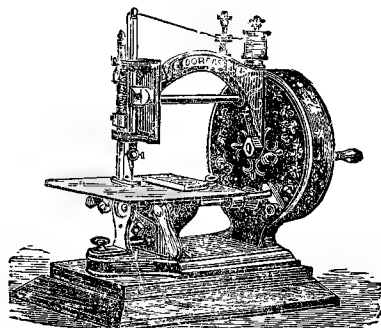
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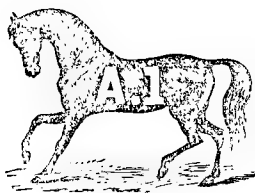
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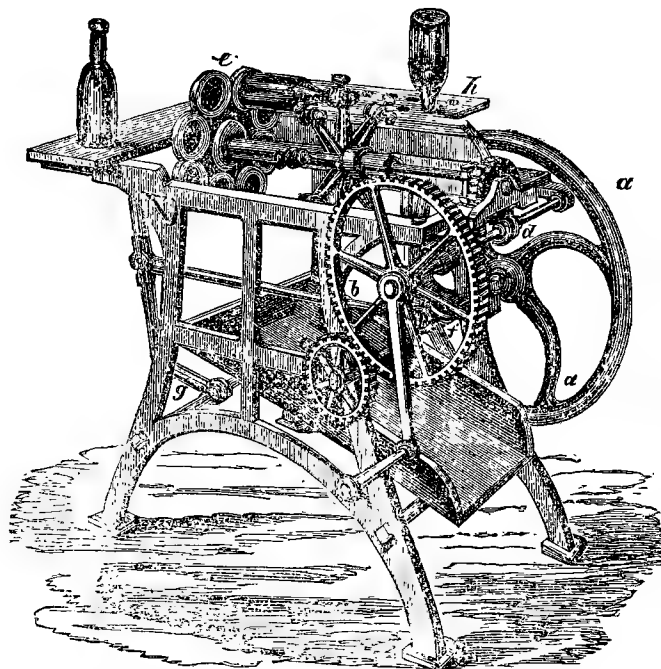
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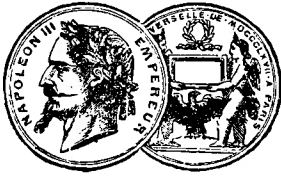
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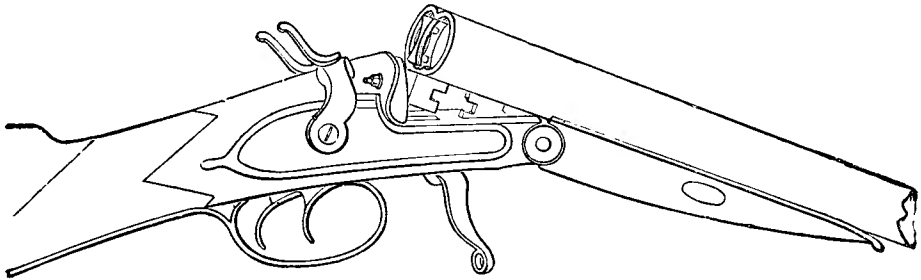
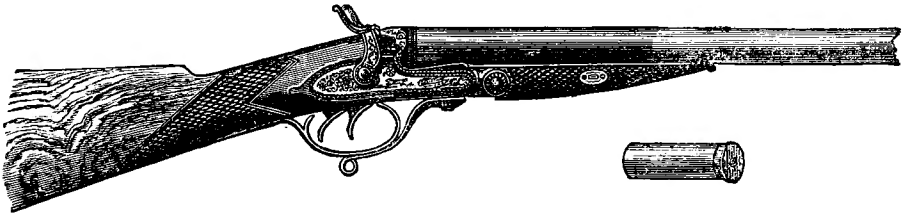
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